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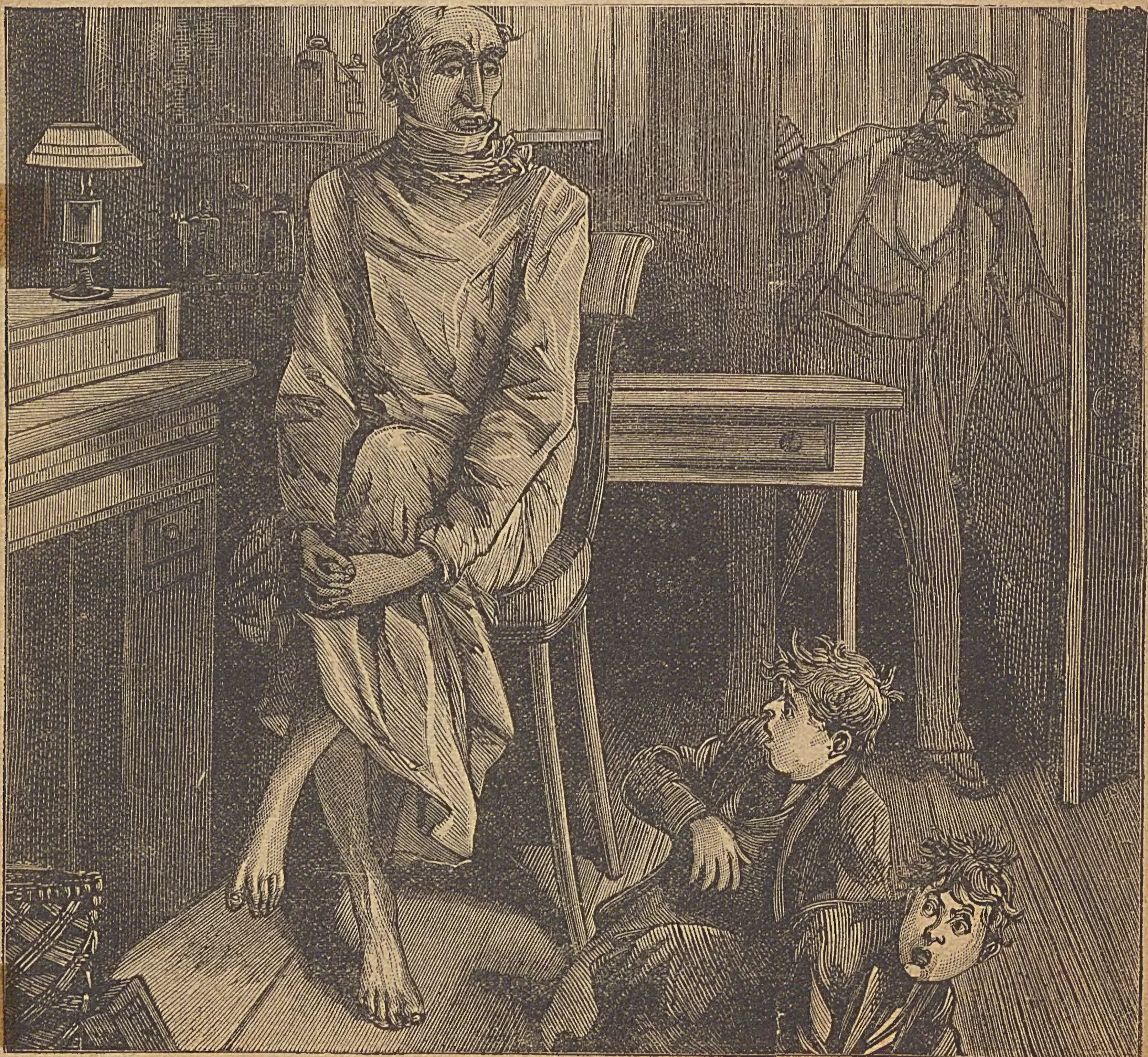
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Vol. I.

THE GRIMSDALE GHOST AND OTHER STORIES.

BY A PHYSICIAN.



THE GRIMSDALE GHOST

AND OTHER STORIES.

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CHAPTER I.

GIVES SOME ACCOUNT OF THE HEMLOCK FAMILY.

GRIMSDALE GRANGE was a lonely and dilapidated manor-house that stood amid extensive grounds, which had once been well kept and beautiful, but were now a mere wilderness.

The owner of this dismal abode seemed a fitting tenant for it, for he was a melancholy, disappointed man.

Yet Mr. Humphrey Hemlock was a very rich, and might have been a happy, or at least a contented man, if he had not given himself up to vain regrets and selfish repinings.

He had seen much struggle and hardship, but had passed through the ordeal with great worldly success, having succeeded in making a large fortune.

But there are just a few things that even the "almighty dollars" cannot buy.

But we shall learn more of the history of Humphrey Hemlock if we listen to the conversation of two gentlemen—a doctor and a lawyer—who, seated in a dog-cart drawn by a fast-trotting nag, are driving along the winding high road in the direction of Grimsdale Grange.

The doctor was a fine, handsome fellow, a little over thirty.

He had a young wife and two little children, and had been in practice at Grimsdale not more than two years, but he had always prospered.

His good looks and gentleman-like manners procured him the patronage of the rich, while his charity and impartial zeal endeared him to the poor.

Dr. Branscombe ardently loved his noble profession, and studied all its branches as diligently now as when he first "walked the hospital," a jovial, light-hearted medical student.

His companion did not look much like a solicitor, though he was a lawyer and the son of a lawyer, and rejoiced in the appropriate and illustrious name of Littleton Coke.

He was a short, fat, puffy man, with a rubicund face and a genial style, more befitting the chairman of a convivial meeting than a man of red tape and musty parchment.

"And you think, doctor, there are still hopes of him?" asked Mr. Coke.

"Can't say," answered the other, flicking the whip. "I never rely much on hope, and I discard despair until the last chance has failed."

"But it's a serious case?"

"Very."

"Ha! I was sure of it or he would never have sent for me," replied Mr. Coke. "Poor Hemlock. I remember him when he was a very different man from what he is now. Does he still take opium?"

"No. Under my advice he has weaned himself from the habit."

"Good thing, very good thing; but what's the matter with him?"

"Don't know—wish I did," replied the doctor.

"You don't know?" cried Mr. Coke. "Bless my soul! I am quite astonished."

"I dare say you are, and so am I," replied the doctor; "but I never profess to know things of which I am ignorant. Can't make it out. Hope I shall in time—I mean before it's too late. If not, get at it afterwards."

"What do you mean by afterwards?"

"When he is dead."

Mr. Littleton Coke pulled up the flaps of his coat and adjusted his woollen comforter over his mouth to keep out the rush of the wintry breeze.

There was an awkward silence.

The lawyer looked discontentedly around upon the dull, cheerless landscape.

Although it was not later than half-past four, darkness was already closing in.

The ground was as hard as marble with the frost, and the road, hedge-rows, and glebe lands were overlaid with a thin cover of fine snow, and on the cat's paws from the north there came at intervals gusts of sleet mixed with icy rain.

The attorney sighed when he mentally contrasted the dreary scene around him with the snug corner and cosy arm-chair by the blazing fire, in his nicely-furnished villa at Brompton.

He began to feel drowsy, but he aroused himself, for he was a chatty and companionable man, and did not like traveling in such glum and disagreeable fashion.

"Let me see, this is the 15th. Ten days hence we shall have Christmas around again. Dear me! how time does fly. I am afraid it will be a dull Yule at the Grange."

"No seasons of the year are marked by much festivity there," replied Dr. Branscombe. "It is the abode of gloom and melancholy. Even in tranquil times its decaying walls are never enlivened by so much as a sprig of holly or a spray of mistletoe. My wife has nicknamed the old mansion the 'Castle of Despair.'"

"How sad!" sighed the lawyer, pulling the bear-skin rug closer over his knees. "Poor Hemlock! And when he was a young chap he was such a jolly dog."

both dead, and died childless. Stop those advertisements, my good fellow. If you don't some impostors may turn up."

"That may be. But suppose your uncle should object to the arrangement?"

"Oh, you mean that ridiculous clause in the old fool's will. Never mind that; you can manage the affair. Besides, I am the man in possession; is it not so?"

"Beyond dispute; but how long will you remain in possession?"

"As long as I live, I hope."

"Don't make too sure."

"What on earth are you driving at?" cried Captain Hemlock, in amazement. "My uncle is dead. If you're drunk I'll forgive you, but I begin to think that you have gone mad."

"Better to be a madman than a murderer," answered the lawyer.

"A what?" shouted the captain.

"But suppose I tell you that your uncle's body has been exhumed?" returned the lawyer.

"What for?" asked the captain, turning as white as a sheet.

"For the *post mortem* examination."

"Has it taken place?" gasped the captain.

"No, for your uncle, though he had decidedly been poisoned, entertains a most unreasonable objection to being disembowelled to prove the fact."

"This is a ghastly jest," faltered the captain; "to prove your words you would have to call my uncle's ghost into the witness-box."

"That is exactly what I mean to do," replied the lawyer, quietly.

Then he gave three distinct raps on the table.

"Arise, most injured spirit," he said, in a hollow tone.

Mr. Coke took a pinch of snuff.

"Humph," he muttered, "pretty good for an amateur. If I were twenty years younger I would take to writing romances."

Slowly the door swayed back, and Humphrey Hemlock entered, pale, haggard, and his brow wrinkled in a stern, denouncing frown.

Captain Hemlock staggered back, as if he had received a violent blow.

"Just Heaven!" he gasped. "I must be dreaming!"

"I think you have been dreaming, captain," chuckled the lawyer. "I hope you will not find the waking up at all unpleasant."

George Hemlock stood speechless, his brain reeling; then, uttering a piercing yell, he rushed toward the door.

His uncle barred his path—he sprang back, laughing and shrieking, and foaming at the mouth.

From that moment, and for many years afterwards, the treacherous and ungrateful man was a raving maniac.

Yet when he recovered his sanity the devil of sullenness and malice possessed him. Though well provided for by his generous relative he went abroad, threw his money broadcast on the continental gaming tables, and got involved in a quarrel with one of his fellow-profligates.

There was a meeting in the Bois de Boulogne.

The duel was fought with swords.

George Hemlock was no match for the French fencer, who, after a few skillful passes, ran him through the heart.

He fell dead on the spot, and molders in a dishonored grave.

* * * * *

A year has rolled away, and Christmas has come around.

How different the aspect of Grimsdale Grange to that which it had presented at the last Yule-tide; then it was the hermitage of the soured and desponding recluse who had so nearly fallen a victim to the diabolical crime of his ungrateful nephew.

Now, swept and garnished, and bright with blazing fires, bounteous cheer, and decorations of green and scarlet holly, and dainty, pearl-berried mistletoe, it was the home of a happy and contented old bachelor, who surrounded himself with genial friends and their merry, affectionate children.

Willie Mountford has just finished his second "half," at boarding school, and is home for the holidays.

Little Alice has been confided to the care of Mrs. Branscombe with as much kindness as though she belonged to her family.

Jonas and Dan Lee, having been paid a large sum of money for their rather questionable service, went off to Australia.

Jonas, however, soon came to grief, getting shot in some tavern brawl, but young Dan is in the employ of a cattle and sheep-grazier, and as his conduct is excellent, and 'Squire Hemlock has promised to provide for him for life, he has every chance of becoming a rich and prosperous man.

Mr. Coke and the doctor are staying at the Grange to spend Christmas.

And now let us leave the happy and united party to their enjoyment, and bid them farewell, while pealing through the hum of conversation, and the silvery gush of children's laughter, the merry Christmas bells proclaim peace on earth and good will to man.

[THE END.]

THE PHANTOM AVENGER;

OR,

THE DEATHMAN'S AX.

CHAPTER I.

HOW EASINGWOLD CAME TO BE FILLED WITH ARMED MEN.

CHRISTMAS was merry Christmas in Easingwold when Queen Elizabeth ruled over a land of peace and plenty.

It was specially merry at Easingwold Abbey, for Sir Philip and his good wife had come from beyond the sea now that Queen Mary had passed away, and had taken back again the broad lands of which his cousin, Sir Haughton Goshawk, had deprived him.

And Sir Haughton had taken his somber face and cunning brains up to Yorkshire, to plot how he might again

become possessor of those broad lands, and secure his cousin's wife for himself.

But Sir Philip took no thought of these things.

It was Christmas Eve, and presently the bells would ring out.

The old abbey was lighted from cellar to battlement, and the great yule-log blazed merrily in the grand hall.

But what is that which makes mirth suddenly shrink from the faces of the domestics as they crowd around the yule-log, and dropping their voices to scared whispers peep timorously over one another's shoulders at the fire?

Hushed are all sounds of mirth now.

The great yule-log is slowly going out and blackening.

But more awful still, it has assumed the shape of a human figure.

Now as they still watch breathlessly the emblem which tells of some misfortune to the house of Easingwold, a thin flame runs around the neck of the face in the fire and leaves behind it a stream of red which to the shuddering imagination is suggestive of blood.

And the outlines of the face in the yule-log gradually become more distinct, turning pale and ghastly in the waning light of the dying fire.

Suddenly a shriek from the women and a gasp of fear proclaim the last transformation in this gruesome emblem.

The head had parted from the trunk.

Where the parting comes for a moment there is a rush of blood red sparks from the severed trunk, and the pallor of grey ash settles slowly over the dead yule-log.

Surely some terrible misfortune will happen to the master of Easingwold.

The silence is broken by the entrance of Sir Philip himself.

A hearty laugh is yet ringing upon his lips over the jest which he has made upon the frightened features of his young wife.

"I vow, dear lord," she said, in a hurried whisper, "that as I came through the western wing, I distinctly saw the white dove fly before me, nay, I could have caught it almost, did not terror hold my hand until it fled away."

"Well, Kate, I take thee at thy word!" cried the stout knight, laughing merrily again. "Some varlet has been playing upon thy fears seeing that this is Christmas Eve, and knowing that thou wast ever somewhat too much given to superstition for a gentlewoman."

"Didst thou not thyself tell me that when the white dove was seen some misfortune was sure to happen to the house of Easingwold?"

"I did but tell thee that for thy diversion when we were a-wooing, sweet Kate, and it was but a sorry jest, since it has made thee sad when all should be merry."

"How now, my merry men all, have ye caught the infection of your lady's melancholy? Why, what a lot of grave-diggers' face there be among ye."

"May it please you, Sir Philip, the yule-log has gone out."

"And is this a matter to cause such consternation?" asked the knight. "It hath lain in some damp place."

"It hath lain in the kitchen this three months, Sir Philip."

"Well, the log was green."

"It hath been cut since last Christmas."

"Well, light me the log once more, and prepare the dance. Hark! there peals the church bells. A merry Christmas to you all."

As the words fell from his lips there came a loud clamor and clang at the gate.

In haste ran the porter to open the gate, first of all demanding who was there.

"Open in the name of the queen!" cried a loud voice.

There was no denying this summons, more especially as a rattle at the door threatened its speedy demolition unless the request was speedily complied with.

With trembling hands the porter undid the various bolts and bars.

Sir Philip, whose haughty face had changed to one of haughty scorn and anger, stood at the upper end of the hall, at the head of his domestics.

Behind him, Mother Hawes, the nurse, was in the act of stealing away with the two children from the noise and tumult, as the door came swinging open.

A troop of men-at-arms, with their long halberds pushing forward, entered.

At their head walked Sir Haughton Goshawk, being guarded on each side by two important characters in this story.

If there was such a thing as professional murderers in this world, Messrs. Gorgon and Griffin—for so they had been dubbed by their lawless companions—might well be entitled to lay claim to that distinction.

Crime, greed, and cunning were stamped upon their features, and brutal were the indisputable marks which time had placed there.

They were of the same hight, and almost alike in the shape of their fat, hideous features.

Their hands were gnarled and knotted.

Each one carried a huge battle-ax over his shoulder, with the air of one who would esteem it a personal favor to be asked to use it on the first unoffending person upon whom his eye might fall.

Although their garb was the same as the other men-at-arms, there was something about their movements which betrayed the fact that they held some sort of command over them, and were on more familiar terms with their leader, Sir Haughton Goshawk.

"I am glad to see you, cousin," said Sir Philip, struggling to keep down his rising anger; "but methinks it were hardly necessary to crave our hospitality with a band of armed men at your heels."

"I crave no hospitality from traitors!" cried Sir Haughton.

"Traitors!"

"That is the word."

In an instant Sir Philip's sword was in his hand.

"Ruffian!" he cried, "I brand you liar, and will presently prove my words good upon your worthless carcass."

"Brawl not here," cried the knight, making a sign to his men-at-arms to advance at push of pike; "or by Heaven, I leave not a soul alive to herald in daybreak!"

In an instant all was confusion.

The retainers ran and snatched what weapons they could find, while the women clung together in shrieking frightened groups.

"Oh, Philip," cried his wife, clinging to him, "beware how you incense that wicked man. Can you not see that he wishes to provoke you to resistance?"

"Thank you for your opinion of me, fair lady," said Sir Haughton, with a sinister grin. "It will change doubtless."

And he darted such a look of vindictive malice and triumph at her that she turned sick and cold.

Had not her husband thrown his arm around her she must have fallen.

"Briefly, what is your object here?"

"To arrest you."

"On whose authority?"

"The queen's."

"What is the charge?"

"High treason."

"Ridiculous!"

"You are charged with conspiring with one Darnley to effect the escape of the Queen of Scots."

"I!" cried Sir Philip, pale with fury. "What vile plot is this against one who has not meddled with politics, nor been out of his own homestead, since our good queen came to the throne?"

"That I know not," replied Sir Haughton Goshawk, handing him the warrant. "You will read there."

Sir Philip cast his eyes over the document.

It commanded that Sir Philip Easingwold should at once be attached and committed to the Tower on a charge of high treason, there to wait until the Star Chamber should attend to his case.

But Sir Philip read further.

To his amazement he found that until he had cleared himself of the attainder, his cousin was to take possession of his estates and administer them.

"This is some of your work?" demanded the knight.

"It is," replied the knight.

"How if I refuse to go upon this ridiculous errand?"

"I am instructed to use force."

"Scoundrel!"

"Use what terms you please to me. This is all the thanks I get for striving to be your friend."

"How?"

"Why, when the order came out for your arrest, I got the appointment, thinking the blow would come less cruelly from me. And who so fit to see that your estates go not to rack and ruin while you are under a cloud, as a member of your own family?"

Sir Philip noted the bitter sneer as he said this.

But he was resolved, for the sake of his wife, not to make any retort.

He knew the man to be a double-dyed villain.

But he was conscious of his own innocence, and felt confident of being able to disprove the ridiculous charge against himself.

"What are your orders?" asked Sir Philip.

"That you proceed to London at once."

"And you?"

"I shall remain here to protect your interests."

"My wife goes with me?"

"No."

"No?"

"I have positive orders to the contrary, and the matter brooks no delay, else you might have stayed until the morning."

"Villain!" cried Sir Philip, "I see through your purpose. But I will foil you yet."

"Will you go willingly, or shall we be compelled to use force? My instructions were to take you, dead or alive."

"Enough," cried Sir Philip; "I go. But mark me, for any act of violence or ill-will on your part I shall exact swift retribution when I have explained away this ridiculous charge."

"Order a horse to be saddled," was all Sir Haughton Goshawk deigned to reply.

In half an hour a horse was brought around.

Sentinels were placed in various positions, so that resistance would have been madness.

As the clock tolled the hour of one on Christmas Day, Sir Philip took leave of his wife and rode away into the forest toward the London road.

He left his wife behind him in a dead faint.

He was destined never to see her again.

CHAPTER II.

GORGON AND GRIFFIN EXECUTE THEIR ORDERS.

For an hour Gorgon and Griffin rode on in silence.

Each one held a bridle-rein of Sir Philip's horse, so that there was no possibility of his escape even if he had so wished it.

They maintained a dead silence.

Presently this was broken by Griffin.

"Comrade," he said, "we have lost our way."

"I think so."

"What had we better do?"

"Dismount and look for the tracks made by our horses' hoofs to-night when we came to the abbey."

"Your way lies straight before you," cried Sir Philip.

"I know every bit of this forest, and will point out the direction you should take."

"S'blood!" bellowed Gorgon; "he takes us for children."

"S'death!" growled his companion; "he takes us for fools."

"I take ye for neither one nor the other, men," cried Sir Philip, "nor am I in the habit of telling an untruth."

"S'blood!" cried Gorgon; "which means to say we lie."

"I said nothing of the sort!" cried Sir Philip.

He saw that the two ruffians were trying to fasten a quarrel on him.

The place was the loneliest and dreariest part of all the forest.

A chill fear came over him.

Suppose they meant to murder him?

Now he bitterly regretted having yielded so easily.

What if, after all, this was a fraud, and the warrant from the queen was a forgery?

This might have been but a trap on the part of his cousin to get him into his power.

"S'death!" cried Griffin, suddenly; "I cannot stand this any longer. We must dismount."

"S'blood!" cried his brutal companion, "that will we!"

In a moment they were on foot, and had forced Sir Philip to do the same thing.

In this way they proceeded for a short time, until they reached a part where the forest appeared to be opening again.

They had arrived at an ancient beech tree, which sent out its branches very near the ground, casting a complete gloom over a space of about twenty feet.

By a preconcerted signal, both men threw themselves upon Sir Philip.

In vain he tried to shake them off.

Their strength was tremendous.

Despite all Sir Philip's efforts, he was bound.

His cries for help brought no assistance, and presently he lay helpless on the ground, with his head across a fallen log.

"Ruffians!" cried Sir Philip, "what mean ye by this fresh outrage? Though I am your prisoner, you have no right to treat me in this fashion."

"As for that, s'death!" cried Griffin, with a hoarse laugh, "you shall have no cause to complain of captivity much longer."

"S'blood, no!" cried his companion.

"I think I won the trick of thee, Griff," exclaimed Gorgon.

"Thou didst, bully boy," assented his companion; "but as my hand is somewhat out of practice, I will give thee a gold piece to take it from thee."

"Not I," returned Gorgon; "nor yet for twenty gold pieces. I have often wanted to feel the thud of my ax upon a knight's neck, and by my faith, there will never come such another chance again."

"You would not murder me?" cried Sir Philip.

He saw it all now.

Better he had died in gallant fight at the head of his household, than be butchered in this horrid manner.

Sir Philip was a brave man, and cared little for the terrors of death.

He had faced the grim king too often to be fearful on that score.

But it was the thought of his wife and helpless children that sent a great throb of agony through his heart.

"Men," he cried, "you cannot be so barbarous. Have I done aught to offend you?"

"That's naught to do with it," cried Gorgon.

"S'death, no!" echoed his companion.

"Do you get gold for it?" cried Sir Philip, eagerly. "Be it so, I will give thee double thou wouldst get from those who employ you now."

"Oh, yes," cried Griffin; "that we know. We have had the same trick played on us before. Have we not, Gorgon?"

"S'death, yes," replied the other ruffian.

"And we never got paid, did we, Gorgon?"

"S'death, no," replied the ruffian.

"So," continued Griffin, "say your prayers, and that right quickly, for we are true sons of the church, and would not kill a man until he has made his peace with Heaven."

Both the men laughed heartily.

And now one of the ruffians unslung his broad ax from his waist-belt.

Sir Philip knew his hour had come.

The ruffian stood gloating over his victim for a moment.

Then there was a gleam of silver light in the air, a dull thud, and the head of the gallant knight flew from his body and struck the ground some distance away.

"'Twas as good a blow as ever I struck!" cried Gorgon, slowly feeling the edge of his broad ax, "but I fear me I have turned the edge of my ax on this yule-log. Plague on it, Griffin, what is it they say about the yule-log avenging blood spilled upon it?"

"Trouble not thy head about what people say," answered Griffin, who now returned, holding the head of the murdered knight in his hand. "I warrant if we were to listen to all such housewives' tales, we would soon have no stomach for the business."

"Well, a few more such errands as these, and it is not poverty that will urge us to make free use of our axes."

"No, bully boy," returned his companion; "and yet methinks even if it were not for gold, I could not long keep my hand quiet."

"'Tis a glorious pastime."

"Thou sayest truly."

"Where gottest thou thy liking for it?"

"My father was headsman-in-chief to the great Louis, and the instinct to kill was in a measure born in me."

"'Twas the same with me long ere I met thee, Gorgon. My mother was a confidential maid to the Borgia, and knew more about deadly poison in her little finger than all the learned doctors in Padua put together."

"Doctors!" cried Gorgon, shaking his head; "'tis a grand profession. Look what opportunities they have! Ah, I was meant for a doctor, I can feel that!"

"Well, we have a good master now, Gorgon," cried Griffin, as he prepared to mount.

"Thou sayest right."

"I warrant he will not let us stay idle."

"No; and I have an idea—ha-ha, ho-ho!"

"Thou art merry."

"Faith! and so would you be if thou hadst my idea."

"What is it?"

"Why, that some day our good master may be treated to the same medicine as he deals out to others."

"By us?"

"Right; by us, the true sons of crime."

This idea so tickled the ruffians that they gave way to a burst of merriment.

It was echoed behind them.

They turned swiftly.

Nothing was to be seen.

Nothing save the old oak tree.

Again the hollow laughter seemed to fill the woods, and as they gazed, fascinated by a terror they had never felt before, a figure seemed to grow out of the light and shade of the branches, and took the shape of the man whom they had just assassinated.

Was it their own guilty imaginations which they tried to conceal under bravado, or was it reality?

Certainly it seemed to them that the figure stretched forth his hands toward them, the same unearthly voice whispered at them:

"Thrice!"

Without waiting to hear more, the two put spurs to their horses, and were presently tearing back to the abbey, not daring to look behind.

CHAPTER III.

HOW LADY KATE RECEIVED HER LORD'S HEAD.

AT the abbey the men-at-arms were gorging themselves over the feast which the frightened servants left untouched.

In an inner room Sir Haughton Goshawk strode up and down,

With eyes dilated in terror Lady Kate watched his movement.

"Now, my sweet Kate," he said to her, in a calm, cynical manner, "it is useless for you to go on in that peevish manner. If anything should happen to Sir Philip—mind, I say if anything should happen to him—who do you think is so fit to be your protector and take care of this fine old place as his cousin?"

"What do you mean?" she asked, staring at him with great wild dilated eyes. "Is there anything else against my husband of which you have not told me?"

"Only this," replied Sir Haughton Goshawk, coolly, "that the chances are about a thousand to one against his ever coming back alive. What would you?" he cried, noticing that a great paleness had overspread her face. "Men must die, and women must weep, but there are plenty of other men in the world, and the place of the dead will soon be filled up by the living."

His meaning was unmistakable.

A knocking at the gate cut short his sentence.

He seemed to be expecting it, for he arose to go.

"Whatever happens," he said, "remember that I am by right your friend and protector. You cannot get away from me, and I would strongly advise you not to try."

Neither of them noticed that a pair of keen black eyes was looking down upon them from the gallery, or that eager ears drank in the conversation.

But the door burst open rudely, and to the clamor of shriek and oath there entered the two ruffians, Gorgon and Griffin.

The latter carried a round thing covered with a cloth.

"Has he escaped?" cried Sir Haughton, in his excitement forgetting the *role* he had elected to play.

"He tried to escape," cried Gorgon, whose pale face worked spasmodically; "he tried to escape, and we shot him. There is the proof."

"Fools! incarnate fiends! what brought you that here for?" roared Sir Haughton, as Gorgon placed the head on the table and removed the cloth.

"You wanted evidence and you've got it," grumbled Gorgon. "It is ever thus when men do their duty. They get naught but hard words for it."

But the knight paid no heed to them.

He was looking at Lady Kate.

The change that had come over the beautiful lady made even his villain heart stop for a moment.

Reason had fled in that horrible moment forever.

She gave a little laugh, and coming forward took the head in her lap and smoothed the long golden masses of hair, and kissed the pale face, talking and chatting to it.

Then she broke forth into a series of fearful shrieks which died away into deep moans, and once more she whimpered and laughed, and patted the terrible trophy.

"Idiots!" cried the knight. "Had you no better sense than to bring that thing here? You have driven her mad!"

"And we have had enough to drive us mad, too!" cried Gorgon. "A plague seize the woman! What is one mad one more or less to us? We have done what you told us; give us our reward."

"I have a mind to give it to you both by hanging you up," replied the knight, furiously. "I meant not that you should do this."

"You should not have been so precise in your instructions then," grumbled Griffin. "And as for hanging, sir knight, there are two can play at that game. If the queen heard of this piece of work, ay, or even if we were to throw open the doors and cry aloud to the rest of your followers, the hanging would not be all one side."

"I did but jest on that score, comrades," replied the knight, hastily. "I thank you. We shall have royal times here. But now haste; finish the work you have so nobly begun."

"And what is that, most noble knight?"

"Another stands between me and the property."

"Whom mean you?"

"The son."

"Ay, the babe. But there is plenty of time for that. I am so thirsty," cried Griffin.

"S'death, so am I," echoed his companion. "That screeching fiend down in the woods gave me a rare fright."

"No—no," cried Sir Haughton, pushing a flagon of strong waters towards them; "the thing must be done to-night, or else they may escape."

"Well, here goes," cried Griffin, whose courage again began to rise under the effects of the stimulant. "One more or less don't make any difference. Where is this brat that you speak of?"

"I will show you the way," cried Sir Haughton, eagerly. "Up these stairs."

"And the mad woman?" demanded Gorgon.

"Let her be; she will harm no one. Would you spoil all our plans in your insane thirst for blood?"

The two made him no answer.

"Mind," cried the knight, "I will not have any more violence done here to-night. You must take them out in the snow. Do what you like with them, only make sure that they never come back to tell the tale."

"Ay, you can count on your bloodhounds for that," cried Gorgon.

They both gave a short laugh.

But the knight interrupted their merriment by a deep oath.

He had thrown open the door of the sleeping apartment.

"Curses on them!" he cried. "They have gone!"

It was true.

There was the little cot, in which slept baby, sister, and brother.

It was yet warm and crumpled where their little bodies had been lying on it.

"Away!" cried the knight, furiously. "Search everywhere. Let every nook and cranny in the place be searched. They could not have passed out through the postern, or some one would have seen them. They are in the abbey."

In a minute all was bustle and confusion.

Servants and men-at-arms alike ran about, in their efforts to find the children.

But without avail.

Afraid to speak their minds openly, yet the servants had come to the conclusion that Sir Haughton Goshawk had carried the children away, and that this search was only a mere sham in order to screen himself.

Had they but looked outside of the abbey, instead of inside, they would have noticed a track freshly made in the falling snow.

And trudging along wearily through this, at the end of about a mile, they would have seen a tall, gaunt, hard-featured woman.

She held two children to her bosom, while a third hung at her back, suspended in a sort of shawl. These were two boys and a girl.

The boy on her back and the girl were fast asleep, but the other boy was crying bitterly.

And she was endeavoring to quiet him.

"Hush, my lamb," she cried. "Hush, my darling, or they will hear us and tear you from me. Oh," she cried, presently, breaking out into a low wail, "Heaven give me strength to defeat these villains."

And Heaven heard her prayer.

The snow-storm cleared away, and no longer was her poor face lashed by the blinding flakes.

Grey dawn broke, heralding in Christmas morn.

It grew broad daylight as she passed the lodge-gates of a glorious old castle.

Distant strains of music broke upon her tired ears, and gave her fresh courage.

It was the waits singing their glad strains before Kimberley Castle.

As she reached the drawbridge, the portcullis was raised, and the earl himself came forward to meet his tenantry, with a broad, hearty smile upon his face.

"Come what may," cried the nurse, "he has a good face, and I will trust him."

From one to the other he went, shaking hands with some and slipping money into the pockets of others.

He was a pleasant-looking man, of perhaps fifty.

But it was the benevolent expression on his face which gave Nurse Hawes the courage to speak as she did.

"You are a stranger here, good mother," cried the peer, "and you look as if you had traveled far. What can I do for you?"

"Do for me?" cried Nurse Hawes; "you can save the lives of these little darlings by taking them in and adopting them."

"But, good gracious, mother! what am I to do with these babies?" demanded Lord Kimberly.

"I'll take care on 'em, my lord, if you will only give us shelter and protection from the cruel enemies who will follow us speedily."

And she told him her story.

The earl was deeply grieved.

"There is some diabolical plot here, Nurse Hawes," he said. "But come what may, I will help you. Unfortunately I am in deep disgrace at the court myself now, or I would be able to give you more effectual help, by myself laying the case before her most gracious majesty. But we will bide our time."

So while Sir Haughton Goshawk's troopers were scouring the country in all directions in search of the heir, his sister, and foster-brother, they were living securely not an hour's run from the usurper's house.

By-and-by the pursuit was relaxed, and gradually the search was given over altogether.

Weeks rolled into years, and still Lord Kimberly made no effort to expose and punish Sir Haughton Goshawk.

"It would be useless," was all he said in answer to Nurse Hawes' entreaties.

They could not prove anything yet, and perhaps the children might be taken from them and given over to the guardianship of Sir Haughton should he find out their whereabouts.

So the children grew and prospered as years rolled on.

They were the wards of Lord Kimberly, they thought, nor ever dreamed that they had any connection in any way with the fierce owner of Easingwold Abbey, who lived in the midst of his retainers in solitary splendor.

None would come near or visit him, and it was said that Sir Haughton Goshawk lived a life of abject terror, being haunted by the White Lady of the abbey.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOSTER BROTHERS AT THE VILLAGE INN.

FIFTEEN years have flown rapidly away since we last looked upon the broad manor of Kimberly.

But then fifteen years have wrought a wondrous change in three of the characters in our story.

The girl had grown into a shapely lass just budding into womanhood, while of the two boys, Errol Easingwold, though somewhat pale and delicate, and, perhaps, a little too youthful-looking for his age, was as straight as an arrow, and as fearless and high-spirited as his own noble thoroughbred.

His foster brother, Chirrup Hawes, was a perfect contrast to him.

There was nothing at all aristocratic about him.

He was round and plump as a partridge.

The chief particulars of his character was a profound conviction that Errol could do everything better than he, and an utter ignorance of fear, and a profound love for his foster-sister, Mabel.

This latter he fairly worshiped, and would at any time have cheerfully lain down his life for his golden-haired playmate.

"Hurrah!" cried Errol Easingwold, dashing into the stable, where Chirrup Hawes was giving a stableman a grave lecture on the proper way of cleaning out a hunter's hoofs, which provoked him alternately to rage and wonder, that one so young should know so much; "hurrah, Chirrup! I've a holiday; what shall we do?"

"How did you get a holiday?" asked Chirrup, ignoring the latter question.

"Why, there's a funny-looking man come down from London to see guardian," answered Errol; "and they say he's come from the court, all ruffles and ribbons, and talks as pompously about nothing at all as though that were the only speech he ever intended to make in his life. But that isn't the worst of it."

"What then?"

"Why, he has a lot of little brown sticks that he puts between his lips, and then he lights one end and draws volumes of smoke into his mouth."

"What for?"

"He calls it tobacco, and says that Sir Walter Raleigh brought it over from those wonderful West Indies, where gold and jewels lie about on the rocks, and there are hills of sugar and rivers of wine."

"Fudge!" cried the practical Chirrup.

"Well, here is one of the sticks," continued Errol.

"Where did you get it?"

"He has a great big box full."

"Have you tried what it is like?"

"No."

"Let's have a try."

The two boys adjourned to the wood, and under a large beech-tree, as many boys have done since, lighted the seegar, and took alternate puffs.

Presently Chirrup broke the silence.

"What does it feel like?" he asked.

"I feel as if my head was flying off my shoulders," said Errol.

"So do I, and—ugh! I'm poisoned!"

He turned suddenly an ashy white.

"So am I," cried his companion. "Ugh! oh, my! run and tell Nurse Hawes to get some medicine; I feel as if I was going to die."

Chirrup staggered to his feet.

He made a gallant struggle to reach the house, but collapsed ere he had gone six yards.

But why linger on their misery?

Suffice it to say that two hours elapsed ere they felt sufficiently well again to move.

"I have an idea," cried Chirrup some three hours later.

"What is it?"

"Could you get any more of those?"

"Yes, why?"

"Why, if one could make us feel like that, one a-piece would have an awful effect."

"Thank you, I don't want to try any more."

"Not us, stupid."

"Who?"

"Gorgon and Griffin."

"How could we get at them?"

"They are sure to be at the 'Black Bull Inn' this time of the day."

"Yes."

"You get the sticks, and we'll go down there and give them to them."

"They'll kill us."

"Will they?" cried Chirrup. "Not if it has the same effect on them that it has had on us."

"I'll go and get them, then," said Errol.

In five minutes he was back, with three of the weeds in his pocket, and accompanied by Mabel, his sister.

"Can I go, too, Chirrup?" asked she. "Errol has been telling me—"

"No; I don't think you had better come," said Chirrup. "You see, boys can run away, and girls can't."

"I can run as fast as you," she replied, somewhat indignantly.

"Yes," asserted Chirrup; "but that isn't the same thing."

A stout argument was held on this point, but finally the girl gave in, and allowed her companions to go by themselves.

The "Black Bull Inn" was situated nearly four miles from the manor of Kimberly, and formed the center of the village which divided the two estates.

Here, when not engaged in hunting or hawking with their master, Sir Haughton Goshawk, it was the custom of Gorgon and Griffin to spend their days in drinking.

They were known as the terrors of the village.

Backed up as they were by the influence of their master, no one dared to say them nay to anything they chose to do.

So it came to pass that when they put in an appearance at the "Black Bull," all decent people left it.

Those who ventured to remain behind were the loafers who toadied to these two ruffians.

Their chief amusement consisted of gambling or cock-fighting.

When they had tired of that, they would amuse themselves by shying stones at boys and women who passed by, or picking a quarrel with any respectable traveler, with the general result of leaving him for dead on the roadway.

Both Errol and his foster-brother had been repeatedly warned not to go near this place, but there was a fascination about it which attracted them in spite of the prohibition.

Age and drink were beginning to tell upon these two ruffians.

They were no longer able to display the activity of former years.

But in proportion as the stiffness of years advanced upon them, so did their appetite for drink and cruelty increase.

The boys hated them with a hatred, the strength of which they could not account for.

Chirrup Hawes used to lie awake at nights and dream of schemes for worrying them, a task in which he was ever successful.

As for Gorgon and Griffin, if they could have got that small fat boy into their power once, there is no question but what they would have paid him out once and for all, for various practical jokes he had had at their expense.

During these expeditions, they had never once run across Sir Haughton, nor indeed did he suspect the existence of the real heir to Easingwold so near to him, else assuredly he would have made some effort to get him in his power.

Baron Kimberly was scrupulous to hold no intercourse with his neighbor.

"There they are, Chirrup," cried Errol, as they approached the "Black Bull," "gambling as usual."

"How shall we give them the West Indian sticks?"

"You leave it to me," replied Chirrup.

"Gorgon will never forgive you for having killed his favorite cock with a falcon the last time you were here."

"Or you for having filled his sack half-full of lime, for the matter of that," returned Chirrup.

"There come those two young imps, Gorgon!" cried his companion.

"So they are," replied Gorgon. "What's their game?"

"After us, I suppose. If I could only hold one of 'em, especially that fat one, between these hands once, I warrant they wouldn't lark any more."

He held up a pair of hands as large as a small ham.

"Boys," cried his companion, philosophically, "is like flies. They're always a-tormentin of you, and there ain't any satisfaction in killing one or two."

"That's so," sighed Gorgon. "Well, what d'ye want here?" he continued, in a loud voice, to the two newcomers.

"What do we want, most valiant beer-swillers?" cried Chirrup, with his saucy laugh; "why, we want you; the glorious twins who never got a wound to show, and yet have killed two hundred Spaniards in their own right."

"D'ye mean to say we didn't?" growled Gorgon.

"I never said anything of the sort," cried Chirrup, with his bright smile, which generally had the same effect on the Griffin that a *banderillo* has on a bull.

"I've a mind to fling this tankard at you," growled Gorgon.

"Don't," cried Chirrup; "you'd only miss your aim and lose your beer."

"Begone!" roared Griffin, "or I'll chop you to mince-meat."

Many a traveler had taken this hint to make himself scarce.

Not so the boys.

Secure in their fleetness of foot, they knew they could defy the ruffians, unless they were armed with bow and arrows or dog.

Many a time indeed had they decoyed them from the village by jeers and laughter.

And while Gorgon and Griffin, intent on vengeance, reeled after their active foes up the lane, suddenly from a concealed ambushade, under the able leadership of Chirrup, would pour forth a shower of stones, which sent them flying back again to the village, cut and bruised, and foaming with rage.

"Come now, my valiant warriors of the pot belly," cried Chirrup, "ye have little cause to be angry with us."

"Begone!" growled Griffin

"I tell you we did come to do you a fair turn. Wilst have it?"

"I'd as lief take a turn from the evil one," said Griffin.

"You'll get that, both of you, in due course," said Chirrup. "Turn and turn about—you'll have a hot time of it, I warrant."

Gorgon sprang up with a fierce oath, overturning the table as he did so.

The boys dodged the two ruffians and took to their heels.

In his flight Chirrup contrived to drop two of the weeds.

Gorgon noticed this, returning from a vain pursuit, and picked them up.

"S'death!" cried Griffin, "we have plunder."

"S'blood!" cried Gorgon, "thou art right. 'Tis what the good knight smokes."

"How came those boys with them?"

"Stole them."

"Like as not. Did not Sir Haughton lock his up in that mighty silver case of his, I had stolen a score long ago."

"The smell is fragrant."

"Didst thou notice how he proceeded?"

"Ay; that did I, and will presently show thee. Ho, mine host! Thou clown, thou churl, thou lump of ready reckoning! haste thee, and bring us two more tankards, find also an ember from the fire."

"S'death!" cried Griffin; "we have not done amiss in that chase. Despatch thee, Boniface, thou fat rascal, or I will beat thee about the head with my sword-hilt."

The trembling landlord lost no time in getting his ruffianly guests the necessary requirements.

"Now will I show thee," cried Griffin, "how heroes can eat fire and swallow smoke."

Chirrup and Errol had prudently taken themselves off

behind a clump of bushes, from which point of vantage they surveyed the scene.

The segars were about half-way finished, and Chirrup and Errol had collected quite a little crowd around them to watch the effect, when Gorgon addressed his companion:

"What thinkest thou?"

"I think," replied Griffin, "that this is the very compound of the devil himself."

"Why so, comrade? The feeling is not ill."

"Ill!" retorted Griffin; "I feel as if I was riding through the air, with all the witches of Hades after me."

"Well, I feel that way, too; and were it not for an uncomfortable qualm, which, every now and then, doth attack my stomach, I would say that, of a surety, I—oh! where was I?—that—pish—oh!" groaned Gorgon, turning deathly white.

The reaction, familiar to many young men, had come.

Then sallied forth Chirrup and Errol from their position.

And with them came at least half the boys of the village.

"You may do what you like with them now, boys," cried Chirrup. "They are bound hand and foot, in proof whereof I show you."

Going up to Griffin, he bestowed a hearty kick upon him.

"Murder shall atone for this!" gasped Griffin.

He made a desperate effort to reach his persecutor, but the exertion only served to make him worse.

He fell back in a state of complete perspiration.

In the meanwhile Errol had performed a like operation for Gorgon.

"Blood shall wipe out this," growled the fierce warrior.

But he was even more helpless than his companion, and made no effort whatever to redress his wrongs.

Then the boys formed in a circle around the two ruffians, singing ironical praises of the downcast heroes.

"Hold!" cried Chirrup, presently.

The procession immediately halted.

"First of all," he added, "we will remove their swords. Take them," he continued, "and throw them in the horse-pond; dying men have no need of swords."

This order was promptly complied with.

"They have fainted," continued Chirrup. "In my opinion they want a little blood-letting."

Half the boys went off and returned with Master Snipperwhip, the village barber.

He was a nervous little man.

In vain he protested that he dared not.

The boys threatened him with the direst vengeance unless he immediately proceeded to crop the prostrate ones.

"Now then," continued Chirrup, who had constituted himself master of ceremonies, "it is very evident that their heads want shaving."

Half the village had by this time assembled, and as the warriors were cordially detested, Chirrup's new command was applauded to the echo.

The barber again protested.

But he was sternly ordered to perform his work under penalty of being served himself in like manner.

The boys had taken the precaution of passing cords around the body and legs of the two discomfited ruffians, so that even had they recovered resistance was useless.

Rapidly under the experienced hands of Master Snipperwhip lock after lock of their grizzled hair fell off.

Then he whipped out his razor, covered their heads over with lather, and in ten minutes their craniums were bald-er than when they had come into the world five and forty sinful years before.

"Now what shall be done with them?" queried one of the crowd. "Thou wast ever of a ready-witted turn of mind, Master Chirrup."

"Cut their bonds, and let them go home," cried Chirrup. "We will promise them worse if they ever again dare to venture into this village."

Fresh yells of delight greeted this proposition.

They cut the ropes which bound them, venting their spite by many a hearty kick for the insults and cuffs they had to endure from them for years.

The uproar was at its height.

The village was like a pandemonium.

Suddenly a great silence and a hush of awe fell upon the crowd.

There came cantering into the village Sir Haughton Goshawk and a half-a-dozen men-at-arms.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Lift those two drunken fools to a seat."

"Stand by to run, Errol!" cried Chirrup. "The cowards will betray us, see if they don't."

"It wasn't us, your worship!" cried a village lout. "It was the young gents from the castle!"

"What young gentlemen—from what castle?"

"Master Erroll and his foster brother, your worship."

"Who are you, young sirs?" demanded the knight.

"Who thus ventures to heap insult on my retainers?"

"I am Errol Easingwold, of Kimberly Castle," replied Errol, "and this is my foster brother, Chirrup Hawes."

"Errol Easingwold!" repeated the knight, mechanically, while a look of fright and surprise passed over his face.

There was a pause for a moment.

The villagers gathered around curiously.

"Lord Kimberly then is some relative, I suppose?" he said.

"He is my guardian," cried Errol.

"Then," replied the knight, with concentrated fury, "I suppose he will be answerable for this outrage done my servants. Meanwhile, until I hear from him, I must keep you in custody."

The boys started.

"Seize them!" he continued, in a sharp, peremptory voice.

"Not if we know it," cried Chirrup, giving Errol a pull.

"Over the wall with you, quick!"

Before the astonished men-at-arms could dismount from their horses, or the frightened villagers obey the command, both Errol and his foster-brother had cleared the low wall which skirted the "Black Bull."

"That's where the mad bull is kept," cried Errol.

Three minutes run brought them to a hedge. But by the time they had gained it half-a-dozen horsemen had cleared the first wall.

"This way," Errol cried, steering for a field over which there was a desperate bit of hedge.

"All the better for us," cried Chirrup.

On they went tumbling down into the next field anyhow.

The bull saw them ere they were half across.

He gave chase, but he arrived at the stile just in time to be too late.

The two boys were dreadfully blown.

"We're sure to be caught," cried Errol.

"Are we?" cried Chirrup, twisting his comical face into an expression of profound disbelief.

"I am not at all sure about that. Let us take a rest; we may as well see the fun."

"What fun?"

"Climb up and look."

Errol did what he was bid. Nor did he forget the sight for many a long day.

Just as he popped his head over the hedge he beheld a man-at-arms flying through the air, while a horse went reeling sideways, uttering a piercing shriek.

He had been gored to death.

Scarcely had the bull finished with him ere half a score of horsemen came flying over the hedge after their leader.

At them went the infuriated bull, turning them over and pitching them out of the saddle right and left, while

the air became filled with the shrieks and groans of dying horses and men-at-arms.

The riders lost all control of their animals, who fled wildly across the field.

Sir Haughton Goshawk had been one of the last to come over the hedge.

No sooner did he see the state of affairs, however, than he wheeled his charger and again put his horse at the hedge over which he had just come.

Hard rode the knight.

Harder still followed the bull.

The boys yelled their triumph.

It was touch and go who would win.

At last as the horse arose for his leap, the bull's horns caught him under the hind-quarters and sent him over the hedge sideways.

Sir Haughton was a splendid horseman.

He felt that the horse would roll over on him.

He flung himself out of the saddle.

Fortune favored him.

Furious with passion, he ordered the pursuit to be abandoned, and getting another horse, rode home, followed by his disconsolate warriors, Gorgon and Griffin.

"I think we may as well go now, Errol," said Chirrup, as the knight and his followers rode off. "We are not at all likely to have any more good fun to-day, and I should think the bull is quite satisfied also."

"I wonder if any of those men-at-arms are dead?"

"Without a doubt," cried Chirrup.

"Do you think that we had better tell guardian about this adventure, Chirrup?"

"I don't know," said Chirrup; "we are sure to get a hiding. Yes, I think we had better."

"Yes?"

"Because you know how he warned us never to have anything to do with Sir Haughton Goshawk or any of his followers."

"Yes."

"I wonder why was that?"

"Because there is an old feud between them."

"Look here, Chirrup," said Errol, coming to a full stop; "the mystery about Mabel and myself has something to do with Sir Haughton."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because why should I be called Errol Easingwold of Kimberly instead of Errol Easingwold of Easingwold?"

"Because Sir Haughton Goshawk owns the latter."

"Then he has no business to."

"Why?"

"I don't know why, but I feel convinced."

"So do I," cried Chirrup. "Look how he flushed up when he heard your name."

"That is so."

"And trembled."

"I know what I mean to do."

"What?"

"Ask guardian for an explanation."

"Perhaps he won't give you one."

"Yes he will," cried Errol. "I am not a child any longer, but a boy, perfectly capable of keeping my own counsel."

"Well, here we are at the castle."

"Where is my guardian?" asked Errol of the old steward.

"He's gone away to London to meet the queen with that foreign-looking gentleman," replied the steward; "and you'll catch it when he comes back."

"What for?"

"Because he wanted to see you very particularly before he went."

"Well, I suppose it will keep until he comes back," replied our hero, and went off to see his sister Mabel and tell her his adventures.

But the matter was not destined to wait until his guardian came back.

How we rush off headlong into excitement and danger, little knowing what the consequences of a single incident of our life may be.

It would have been better for Errol if he had let the foreign-looking gentleman's segars alone.

CHAPTER IV.

GORGON AND GRIFFIN PLAN A SURPRISE.

SIR HAUGHTON GOSHAWK reached home in a state of mind in which it would be difficult to tell which troubled him the most, fear or fury.

Alternately he gave way to a burst of one and the other.

Of a sudden he had discovered that the heir to the property, whom he had fondly deemed dead, had been living close beside his estate under the protection of a powerful baron.

No doubt the baron was well acquainted with all the details of the plan by which he had placed himself in possession of Easingwold Abbey at a time when suspicion and guilt of treason were thought to be synonymous terms.

The times had changed vastly now.

Good Queen Bess sat securely on her throne, having to fear treason from none.

All her enemies had been trampled under her feet, and she was ill-disposed to listen to anyone who came to her with tales of treason.

Still less would she, or her wise lord treasurer Burleigh, clap any man into the Tower without duly hearing the charge against him.

Yes, there could be no doubt of it, and Sir Haughton Goshawk crunched his teeth in savage fury as he thought of it.

The wily Baron Kimberly had been biding his time.

Sir Haughton would be brought to book for his misdeeds, and the flimsy pretext by which he secured the order of arrest for poor Sir Philip Easingwold be made as clear as daylight.

There was only one thing to do.

The heir and his sister must be secured at all hazards.

With them out of the way, he felt that, as heir-at-law, he could face the storm if storm should come.

But the next question which presented itself to his intriguing brain was how the children were to be secured.

He felt convinced that after what had happened, they would no longer be allowed out without a sufficient escort.

There was only one thing to be done.

Disguise a party of men, storm the castle and carry them off.

He could deny all knowledge of the matter afterwards.

Full of this idea, he summoned Gorgon and Griffin to his councils.

They had got wigs to wear over their bald pates when ushered into his presence.

But they still looked remarkably seedy.

"Tell me, ye drunken knaves," he cried, in anger, "how came ye to create this disturbance in the village?"

"As for being drunk," cried Gorgon, insolently, "we will get drunk as often as we like."

"S'death! so we will," cried Griffin.

"But it so happens that on this occasion we were not in drink."

"What!" cried the knight, "would ye tell me to my face that ye were not in a beastly state of intoxication?"

"That will we tell thee, and more too," cried Gorgon; "more perhaps than thou wouldst care to hear. So lay aside those fine airs and listen to a plain tale, or you may hear something you might not like in lieu thereof."

"S'death! so he might," cried Griffin.

The knight made them a gesture to go on.

He was afraid of these men, and they knew it.

"Briefly then, since thou art now in a more reasonable and proper frame of mind, Gorgon and myself were at the 'Black Bull' having our morning draught, which never exceeds a quart, does it, Gorgon?"

"No."

"Well, then there comes to us two young varlets and gave us insolence. Upon our arising to reprove them they fled, when one of them dropped two of those Indian weeds which you are in the habit of smoking sometimes."

Sir Haughton started.

The weeds were only used by those at court.

Evidently some one from London must have been at the castle.

A straw shows which way the wind blows.

Even now he might be too late.

"Well," continued Griffin, "we smoked them, nor ever thought it was a trap laid for us. If ever thou dost catch me putting one of them to my lips again may I be dragged with wild horses."

He paused here and placed his hand ruefully across his chest.

Even the remembrance was painful.

"Thou knowest the rest," continued he; "how the varlets ill-used us when we were nought but lumps of dough to be molded as they wished."

"For which we will presently take our revenge," added Gorgon.

"So we will," cried his companion, with a fearful oath.

"Then thou hadst needs be quick about it, my good Gorgon and Griffin. Know you who that saucy youngster was with the red plume in his bonnet?"

"Ay, well enough."

"Who?"

"Some relation to the Earl of Kimberly."

"Nothing of the sort."

"Who, then?"

"The son of the man whom ye murdered fifteen years ago."

"Sir Philip Easingwold?"

"Yes."

The men's jaws dropped.

Their expressions became hideous and distorted.

In the gathering gloom one could see their eyes rolling frightfully.

"S'death! what is that?" cried Griffin, suddenly staggering back.

"Where?" cried Gorgon, almost falling over his companion.

To their excited imaginations it seemed as if a figure slowly formed out of the shadows of the great hall, and holding forth its hands, pointed at them.

Then came to them, it seemed, in a still unearthly whisper, one thrilling word:

"Thrice!"

With a loud howl of terror the men fled from the apartment.

But Sir Haughton, with pale face and cold sweating brows, went to the window and drew back the curtain.

A flood of moonlight filled it on the instant.

Resolutely turning his back to the light, he looked where the men had gazed.

There was nothing to be seen, save a figure in armor.

He remembered it to have been there for years.

But so great was his fury at the deception which had played his imagination and that of his fellow ruffians such a trick that he dashed it to the floor with his fist.

As he did so, a white figure swept across the room, and a wild, piercing shriek, like the wail of a lost soul, filled the apartment.

It was heard in the larder, and this, added to the pantomimic gestures of Gorgon and Griffin, who were fervently embracing one another in their fright, added not a little to the terror and confusion.

"The White Lady of Easingwold," whispered the servants; "she always appears on Christmas Eve."

But presently down the grand staircase came the fierce knight himself, and in a voice of thunder he demanded lights.

"Lights, ye varlets!" he roared; "what, a murrain seize ye, because I have knocked down a suit of armor and frightened some serving wench, must ye be at your *Pater noster*; I mean your psalms and collects?"

His domestics made a feeble show of obeying him.

It was evident that he himself was not without fear, although he put so bold a front on it.

"Lights," he continued; "fill the abbey with lights, from cellar to roof if ye be afraid, but let me have no more of this nonsense. As for ye, ye coward knaves!" he continued, shaking Gorgon and Griffin heartily until their bullet heads knocked together, "have done with your terror, and follow me to the library. I would speak to ye on business of importance."

The crestfallen wretches, without a murmur, followed the one whom they had so lately bullied.

But it was particularly noticeable that the domestics lost no time in having the abbey covered with a flood of light.

Three hours from that time, a band of men went silently through the forest, in the direction of Kimberly Castle.

They wore crape on their faces, and their leaders were Gorgon and Griffin.

Each one was armed to the teeth, and if looks went for anything, there would be murder done on Christmas Eve.

CHAPTER V.

HOW ERROL ONCE MORE SEES HIS HOME.

THE porter lay dozing before the wicket-gate.

In the lower hall the servants and retainers were making merry.

Presently there came a low tapping, which roused him from his slumbers.

"Who goes there?" he demanded.

"It is I, Master Weevildip," answered a voice.

"And who art thou?"

"Tim Wakindead, the blacksmith."

"What dost thou want, Tim?"

"Merely to have a chat with thee this Christmas eve."

"Go thy way, Tim," replied the porter. "Dost thou not know that my lord has gone to London with my Lord of Burleigh, and that he has given orders that no one be admitted until he be returned."

"A plague on it," returned the voice. "And he did give me a special invitation before he went. 'Honest Tim,' said he, 'be sure thou dost attend the merry meeting at Christmas Eve,' said he, 'and crack a stoup with old Master Weevildip!'"

"In that case, Tim, I may let thee in, though as for cracking a stoup, I may tell thee I have cracked too many already for my old head, having in a measure the safety of the castle in my keeping."

"Thou hast the castle in a measure, and the drink in a measure, and both in thy keeping. So I pray thee let me into one measure that I may try the other."

"Ha-ha, Tim, thou wast ever a witty fellow!" cried the old porter, whose trembling hands were busy pushing back bolt and bar. "What hast done with thy voice, man? It is as hoarse as a raven's."

The door was pushed open rudely, and poor Master Weevildip found, when it was too late, how he had been deceived.

Ere he could cry out, the battle-ax of Gorgon smote him to the earth, and his gruff voice said:

"That is the last measure thou wilt ever want."

As the prostrate body of the porter fell across the hall, Gorgon spoke to his followers.

"Guard the entrance to the servants' hall, while we search for the brats."

Heading half-a-dozen men, they rushed up stairs.

In adjoining rooms slept our hero and his sister Mabel.

A moment later, and Gorgon burst into one, while his companion invaded the other.

"Here they are!" they cried, with a fierce burst of exultation.

In another moment the twain were snatched up, and carried, shrieking, down the stairs.

"I know not what prevents me from dashing his brains out!" growled Gorgon. "But that I know Sir Haughton Goshawk has a subtle brain and does everything for the best, I'd do so."

In the meanwhile a scene of the direst confusion prevailed down stairs.

With difficulty the men-at-arms kept back the servants, who, urged on by the desperate words of Nurse Hawes, charged them again and again.

Three times was the steel line pierced, and three times were the retainers forced back.

"Fire the castle!" cried Gorgon to one of his companions; "that will give them something to attend to."

As he spoke he dashed out of the place, followed by his companions.

A man-at-arms seized a torch and flung it among the heavy curtains which separated the dining-hall from the retiring room.

In an instant the flames leaped up and licked the paneling.

Then, ere the frightened servants, panic-stricken by the new danger, could collect themselves, they effected their retreat, and getting to horse, rode away through the darkness.

Long before the servants at Kimberly Castle had put out the fire, which at one time threatened to destroy the castle, the band of raiders were snugly housed.

Errol and Mabel were thrust into a chamber in the western turret.

Home again after fifteen years' absence.

They were in a perfect state of bewilderment, and when the heavy oaken doors closed upon them Errol was almost inclined to believe it a fearful dream.

He was speedily to be convinced of its stern reality.

Once more the heavy oaken doors opened, this time admitting Sir Haughton Goshawk and his two companions, Gorgon and Griffin.

"You see, young sir, you cannot so easily escape me," he said.

"By what right have you carried me away from my home?"

"By the right of might," snarled the knight. "However," he added, "you can soon release yourself."

"How?"

"Sign this paper, in which you renounce all claim to the Easingwold estate, and declare yourself the natural son of Baron Kimberly, and you are free to go."

"Have I then a right to Easingwold? I knew it not until now. Thank you for telling me, Sir Haughton Goshawk; now I know I stand in the presence of the man whom my foster-brother told me murdered my father. Know that if it were to purchase my life a thousand times I would not do it at the expense of dishonor. Assassin, do your worst! I defy you!"

He flung his arm around his sister Mabel, and drew her to his bosom.

The knight turned livid.

"Your blood be upon your own head," he cried. "I would have spared you! Gorgon, Griffin, do your work!"

"Right willingly will I," cried Gorgon. "Here is something that will beat them."

He swung aloft his heavy ax. A shrill scream fell upon their ears.

At this moment a panel flew open, and the draught of air blew out the torch which Griffin carried.

From the opening came forth a woman in white.

"Fly!" she cried, pointing to the opening, and then burst into a shrill, piercing laugh. "Ha!" she cried, "villain, I have foiled you, though I am mad!"

Gorgon and Griffin had let fall their axes, and now knelt upon the floor with chattering teeth, in which the only distinguishable sound was:

"The White Lady!"

"Fools!" hissed the knight, livid with rage; "it is only the mad Lady Easingwold."

He sprang toward the panel.

But she was too quick for him.

In a second the sharp click of the lock told him he was foiled.

He turned upon her in savage wrath, and dashed her to the floor.

Then, drawing his dagger, in his rage would have finished his work, but his followers sprang forward and intercepted his arm.

"Let her alone," cried Gorgon, hoarsely; "she is dead, and there is the ghost of the murdered knight."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW CHIRRUP FOLLOWED UP HIS OWN IDEAS.

CHIRRUP HAWES was a boy of a peculiar turn of mind. It might be termed inventive and inquisitive.

When, therefore, on the following morning, all the household were in a state of direst confusion over the disappearance of Errol and Mabel—when messengers had been dispatched in hot haste to acquaint the baron of the fact—Chirrup put this and that together, and came to the conclusion that he knew where Errol and Mabel were.

Force could not do anything against the well-kept walls of Easingwold Abbey, and while they were battering at the gate, his brother might be murdered and buried in a dungeon.

But strategy might do a great deal.

As he was a small boy, he might escape particular notice, always providing he kept out of sight of Gorgon and Griffin.

Accordingly, soon after nightfall he departed for the castle.

He had heard of how Richard Cœur de Lion's minstrel found him out by playing his favorite airs, and he determined to try the same thing.

But though he circumambulated the castle all night long until grey dawn broke, and whistled his loudest of the airs which he and Errol used to sing together, he got no response, save indeed a couple of arrows shot at him by an exasperated sentinel, who took him for some drunken village lout.

* * * * *

For awhile Errol and Mabel found themselves in darkness.

Then, as their eyes became accustomed to the faint light, they perceived that they were in a square, low, vaulted chamber.

Around and around they crept.

But they could not discover any mode of egress.

Even the opening by which they had entered seemed to be of solid stone, moving on a central pivot.

There was no means of finding the spring.

Unless the person who had let them in chose to let them out, they were prisoners for life, and might stay there until they died of starvation.

Wearied out at last, they locked themselves in one another's arms, and fell fast asleep.

Grey dawn was streaming in through the narrow opening high up in the wall, and beyond reach, when Errol awoke.

He had hardly returned to consciousness, when he heard a low, tremulous whistle, clear as the trill of a lark.

He knew it at once.

It was the signal he and Chirrup had often used.

Reckless of the consequence he answered it.

A second more, and a stone came flying through the window.

He picked up the stone, and flung it back.

Ten minutes of weary waiting ensued.

Then it grew dark for a moment, and a cheery voice cried:

"Here, make fast that to something!"

It was the end of a line.

"Up you come!" cried Chirrup; "you have no time to lose. Those men-at-arms are not much use at shooting in the dark, but they can make good practice in daylight!"

Ten minutes more, and brother and sister had squeezed their bodies through the narrow opening.

They were free.

"You'll have to clamber down by the ivy—that's the way I got up," said Chirrup. "The rope ain't long enough."

This was a tedious piece of work.

But it was accomplished in safety.

They were free.

Chirrup's next sentence was brief but emphatic.

"Fly!" he cried.

They needed no second bidding.

For half-an-hour they continued at a terrific pace.

Then Mabel gave a little cry and fainted.

"Quick, go for some water!" cried Errol. "I will wait here until you come back."

He was so occupied in endeavoring to restore Mabel that he did not notice the tramp of armed men.

In another moment he was surrounded and securely bound.

Not far off was Chirrup.

He had been captured also.

"Ha, by my stars, this is a piece of luck just as we had given them up," cried Sir Haughton. "They shall not escape me the second time. Quick, Gorgon, Griffin! Up with your axes, men, lay them across that log."

In a few seconds they now were placed in position.

So occupied were the troops by this impromptu execution that they gave no heed to a fresh tramp of horse that was growing louder and louder.

"S'death!" cried Gorgon, suddenly; "if it be not the same yule-log where we dispatched their father."

As he spoke, his companion gave a scream of terror, and dropped the upraised ax he had been holding.

"There—there!" he cried; "the knight again. By the holy grail, 'tis no fevered imagination."

"Hold!" cried the specter, "hold your desperate hands! This is the third time!"

The same whisper they had heard before, and each one saw distinctly the figure of a comely cavalier standing beside the hollow oak.

Almost at the same moment came a sharp human voice, calling out in authoritative tones:

"Surrender!"

Sir Haughton Goshawk, who had been holding Chirrup, turned around to see who it was.

At that moment the boy snatched a dagger from the knight's girdle, and plunged it into his heart.

"Hang me those ruffians to a limb of that oak tree," cried a clear voice.

And the order was obeyed with as little delay as possible.

The next minute Errol and his sister were free. Baron Kimberly was returning with the warrant for Sir Haughton Goshawk's arrest on a charge of murder, when messengers met and caused him to hurry his movements.

* * * * *

It required but little evidence to prove Errol's right to

Easingwold Abbey, and he shortly afterward took possession, dividing the manor with his foster-brother.

Years afterwards a handsome young courtier led to the altar the heiress of Lord Kimberly.

Few who saw the handsome couple thought that Mabel Easingwold had chosen to fall in love with her own foster-brother."

[THE END.]

THE ORPHAN BOYS;

OR,

TWICE DOOMED TO DEATH.

PART I.

THE HIGH CLIFF.

It was a fine evening in autumn, and the splendid scenery of that favorite seaside resort, Cliffville, was illumined with all the splendor of sunset.

A gentleman, accompanied by two boys, of eight and six years of age, having had a walk up to the old ruined castle which formed one of the sights of the neighborhood, were now leaving the adjacent pleasure-grounds and directing their steps toward the High Cliff.

The gentleman was under middle age, tall, dark, and of somewhat grave and thoughtful aspect; the children were both pretty little fellows, with curling golden hair and bluish-grey eyes.

They were dressed in mourning, having recently had the misfortune to lose their mother.

Their father, Wilbert Willison, had died two years before.

He had left a considerable property, having inherited not only his own share of the family possessions, but subsequently that of his deceased sister, Mrs. Waife.

Her son, Harry, would have had her portion, but he was of a wild, roving disposition; he had gone for a sailor, and after being for years lost sight of, was now ascertained to have been lost in the wreck of the *Brian Boru*, on her voyage home from China.

Mr. Garth Willison, the only surviving brother of Wilbert, was now, therefore, left as the principal representative of the family.

He had been appointed the trustee and guardian to the two children, Wilbert and Charles, and should they not live to attain their majority, he would inherit the property left to them.

He was at this time in greater difficulties than he would have cared to confess.

In his youth he had been, like his nephew Harry, a scapegrace and ne'er-do-well, a restless rover in foreign lands, but he had now settled down to the grave responsibilities that devolved upon him.

The children enjoyed their ramble, and longed to reach the summit of the cliff, whence it was said a splendid view was to be seen.

"Oh, there's a seat!" exclaimed Charlie, pointing to a wooden bench further up.

"Have we got to the top yet, uncle?" asked Willie.

"Not quite, I think, my dear," he replied, casting anxious glances around him. "One can scarcely tell when one has got to the top of these high places, where one hight arises above another."

He seated himself on the seat.

"Mind, for goodness sake don't go near the edge," he continued; "it's a dreadfully high steep cliff, and there are no railings."

But the children did not long heed his warning, and continued to wander on.

"Oh, Willie, look here!" cried out Charlie.

Willie hastened to his side and joined him, standing upon a rugged chalky edge, sloping upward to an abrupt termination.

"Here we are at the very tip-top of the cliff, I declare," said Charlie.

"Just where uncle said we musn't go," returned Willie. "Keep back; I won't have you go any nearer."

"But I want to look over."

And in spite of Willie's remonstrances, his younger brother, creeping on all fours, and clutching the rocky projections, advanced till he could bring his chin over the ledge and look down.

The sight filled him with surprise and terror.

"Oh, my!" he exclaimed, "I can't stand this—it's awful—it makes me quite giddy."

"I told you so," replied Willie; "come away at once."

But though he said this, Willie could not resist his own desire to look down the terrible precipice.

For four hundred feet the cliff went sheer and steep down to the sea, which boiled and surged and dashed itself in loud, warning waves against the mighty boulders at its feet.

Willie shuddered and drew back, then helped his little brother to arise.

They stepped back two or three feet on to the rugged path.

From here the view was magnificent, and soon riveted all their attention.

The sun was setting over the sea, flooding it with a magnificent burst of crimson, gold and purple light.

On the other side, however, the clouds loomed dark and threatening.

A vessel could be seen here and there, and the scream of the gulls mingled with the roar of the waves.

"Oh, isn't this lovely!" exclaimed Charlie. "Shouldn't I like to be in one of those vessels sailing on and on, till I get right to the setting sun?"

"Why, you'd be burnt up with the heat before you got there," said Willie.

"I mean to one of those islands," said the child, pointing to the sunset's glories, "those beautiful purple and golden islands over there, like what we read of in fairy tales."

"Islands? They're not islands—they're only clouds," said Willie.

Suddenly the two children felt themselves violently clutched from behind.

With a cry of terror and amazement, they looked up.

It was their Uncle Garth.

Never before had they seen him look so terrible.

He seemed to have been seized with a sudden frenzy.

Without a word, he tightened his grasp upon the collar of each boy, and dragged them both to the edge of the precipice.

His murderous purpose was now obvious.

The instinct of self-preservation gave them double strength to resist.

They shrieked for mercy—for help.

They struggled, and clutched the masses of rock beneath them, but all in vain.

What was the strength of two children against that of a strong man, determined, in his murderous fury, to effect their immediate destruction?

A moment more, and Garth Willison, bending back to give himself greater force, hurled them from him.

They had disappeared over the rocky ledge.

The murderer stepped back.

Like *Macbeth*, he "dared not look on what he had done," and gaze over to see them dashed upon the rocks beneath, or disappear beneath the surging waves.

The last piteous entreaty—their last shriek of despair still rang in his ears as he rushed frantically back and cast himself again upon the rustic seat.

Yet the crime was not one of sudden impulse.

Driven to his wits' end for want of money to pay off his numerous debts, jealous of these children, whose existence stood between him and the wealth he coveted, Garth Willison resolved upon this dreadful course.

The deed had been cleverly planned.

He knew how unlikely it was that any spectator would be on those wild rocks at that hour, and when all was over he intended to rush back to the town and give the alarm with well-simulated agony of mind.

He had taken the children for a walk. In spite of his warning they had strayed near the cliff's edge and fallen over before he could prevent it.

What explanation could be more natural?

Suspicion might arise, but nothing could verify it, and whether or not the bones of the victims were recovered, there could be no way of proving that violence had been used.

Still their dying shrieks continued to ring through his fevered brain, their cries of "help!—help!" to sound in his ears.

But could it be mere fancy?

Surely those were actual sounds!

He lifted up his head and listened.

Yes, there were cries for help in children's voices; coming, as it seemed, from below the face of the cliff.

As this new impression entered his tortured mind, he was suddenly startled by the figure of a man rushing past him to the edge of the cliff.

The figure threw itself face downwards upon the edge, looked over, and then these words came to his ears:

"All right, my dears, I see yer. I'll help yer—I can just reach. Ketch hold o' this—the little un' fust. He's got it—that's the style!"

A few moments more and the two children, alive and safe, though still half-dead with terror, had landed on the top of the cliff.

How had the miracle been wrought?

Simply enough.

Garth had surely thrown them over, but they had fallen, not, as he supposed, down the sheer face of the cliff, but upon a narrow ledge about five feet below the summit.

In this place grew a thick bramble bush, and on this they had alighted.

They cried and shouted for help, and in the nick of time it came in the person of the man who had now rescued them.

He looked like a mendicant or tramp, being a powerful gipsy-looking fellow of forbidding countenance and in ragged attire.

In his hand he carried a long stick, by whose aid he had effected the rescue.

"Well, guv'nor, this is a pretty piece of business, ain't it?" said he. "Lucky I happened to be along just now, or the kids would ha' been done for. What made you do it?"

"Fellow!" said Willison.

"Come, don't distress yourself," returned the tramp; "it's quite useless you denying anything, 'cos I've been an eye-witness of the whole affair. We'd better understand each other from the first. We ain't strangers, you know."

"I don't know you."

"Don't you? Look again."

Garth did look, and in astonishment exclaimed:

"Durker!"

"Desmond Durker, formerly able seaman, and your servant in Canada—yes, that's me. I'm hard up. You was the very party I've been a-looking out for, for a good bit. I called at Ferndale and made inquiries, and now I understand exactly how you stand. The kids are in the way, and you want 'em out of it. Just so."

The man's assurance fairly amazed Garth.

"How came you here?" he asked.

"On my two legs, assisted by a stick as usual," replied Durker; "carriages ain't much in my way. In point of fact, I've been having a long snooze in them bushes there, and I'd just woke up, when I see you and the young uns arrive. I knew you at once, and somehow I had my suspicions as something was up, but blessed if I thought you were on for such a desperate game as murder."

"Hush!" cried Garth.

"So now I've got a hold on you," proceeded Durker, "and I should be a fool not to turn it to account. But I think I can serve you at the same time. Let's come to terms."

Here he turned around to the children, who stood tremblingly by his side, and fiercely commanded them to go a little distance off and wait till he'd had a talk with their uncle.

Garth had recognized the man as one of his former companions, and knew him to be a desperado capable of any atrocity.

He was in the fellow's power, and there was no way of escape.

So he made a bargain with him on the spot.

"So that's settled," said the tramp, rising at last, and looking around. "Halloo! if the kids ain't off. Never mind, I'll soon ketch 'em; leave the rest to me," and he darted away.

Darkness had just fallen over the town of Cliffville when Mr. Willison, drenched with the descending rain, covered with mud, and apparently in great distress of mind, rushed into the police-station with the dreadful intelligence that his two nephews had strayed from him during the walk, and in the twilight had fallen over the High Cliff.

A party of men with lanterns repaired to the scene of the disaster.

Another party put out in a boat, and made for the rocks below, but beyond the two caps of the children, no indications of them could be found.

Several subsequent searches were made, but their bodies were never discovered.

Mr. Willison's tale found ready credence; his well-acted agony of mind deceived everybody, and none doubted as to the fate of the Orphan Boys.

PART II.

ANCHOR ALLEY.

THE scene is changed to a squalid upper room, in an old house in Anchor Alley, Ship street, Tiger Bay.

This, one of the lowest quarters of London, a locality given up to all the scum of humanity that infests the port

of London, was certainly no fit place for the orphan children.

Yet they are here, and how came it about?

Desmond Durker, who soon overtook his victims, resolved that they should not again leave his custody until he had deposited them in some place of safety.

He led them to a village some miles from Cliffville.

By the time they reached there, with their clothes torn in the struggle, covered with mud, and drenched with rain, their respectable appearance was so changed that no one could have recognized them, and they looked no unfit companions for the tramp.

He hurried them to the railway station, just in time to catch the last train up to London, hustled them into a third-class carriage (they were too much frightened to resist), and before midnight the party had reached the metropolitan terminus of the line.

Taking his helpless charges by the hand, Durker plunged into the wilderness of east London.

He led them through a number of courts and back streets to Anchor Alley.

Here, in a vile den, a tavern frequented by tramps, thieves, and foreign sailors, he bribed the people of the place to allow one of their upper rooms to become the prison of the unfortunate children.

An old woman of repulsive aspect, who was addressed by Durker with the affectionate title of "Mother Mumbles," undertook to be their assistant jailer.

No tears nor entreaties on their part could induce her or Durker to permit them to escape.

A short pair of steps enabled them to get fresh air by ascending to the roof, which was large and flat and commanded, as Durker expressed it, "a splendid view of no end of chimblies and housetops, and all the shipping on the river."

What a change from their happy state of a short month before, when their dear mother still lived, and they knew not sorrow or hardship!

Days and weeks passed, and their condition remained unchanged.

Desmond Durker had threatened to murder them if they made any attempt to escape.

He was always about the place, but seldom came to see them.

The ex-sailor was now in his element.

He took care to "bleed" his patron most freely, and he was enabled to drink and gamble with his old shipmates.

But however far gone in liquor, he never revealed the "good spec" he had made in getting possession of the children.

None but the people of the house knew of their existence.

Meanwhile, Mr. Garth Willison had now taken possession of his nephews' property, and removed to the family residence.

The continual secret drains upon his purse, and the consciousness of being in the power of a scoundrel like Durker were very disquieting to him, and more and more the dark thought impressed itself upon his mind that if the children were really dead his safety would be assured.

He seldom came to London without a secret interview with Durker, whose demands continued to increase, and were often accompanied by threats.

It was impossible for such a state of things to last, and even then there was but one way—the permanent removal of the orphans.

Their uncle had little scruple in proposing to resort to this last extremity.

After some hard bargaining, Desmond agreed, for a large sum to be paid half in advance, to commit the crime in such a manner that it should never be discovered.

The diabolical design was carefully conceived.

The two boys were to be murdered, whether by some

weapon, or by poison, or suffocation, and buried in quicklime in a disused well in the yard.

No one would miss them.

Years might pass before any remains of them would be discovered, and then they would be beyond all chance of recognition.

Meanwhile, Desmond, his name changed, intended secretly to emigrate to Australia, and to begin a fresh life upon the money received as the price of blood.

Ruffian as the man was, he found it difficult to carry out this scheme.

Time after time he nerved himself to the task, but each time was disarmed by their innocent and pleading manner.

But one night he had been as usual drinking deeply, and gambling with some foreign sailors till they had won nearly all his money.

Maddened by drink and disappointment, Durker would have attacked his successful opponent, but in the confusion of another drunken row in the same room the winner managed to slip away.

Durker passed out of the room and ascended the stairs in a state of mind dangerous to anyone he might meet.

He felt primed for any violent atrocity.

The two orphans were up stairs, probably asleep.

He had already taken half the price fixed upon for the crime.

Another two hundred and fifty pounds depended upon his making their sleep eternal.

It was nearly one in the morning.

The noise made by the few revelers and gamblers still remaining down stairs did not penetrate to the upper apartments.

Here all was quiet as the grave.

Even the drunken and desperate villain was cowed by the terrible stillness.

He took off his boots to walk more silently.

He approached the prison of the orphans and listened.

They were sleeping calmly, folded in each other's arms.

The bright moonlight flooded the room and lit up their innocent beauty with an angelic radiance.

All the ferocity of the ruffian's nature was now aroused.

He flung off his coat and turned back his sleeves, like one intending to set to some hard work.

Then he took up his weapon.

It was a broken poker in the rusty grate.

So, armed with his terrible weapon, he advanced noiselessly toward his victims.

He was within two yards of them, when one of the rotten boards creaked beneath his feet.

The sound disturbed Willie, who turned and sat up in bed, though his brother still slept.

Picture the horror and amazement of the child on finding himself thus face to face with a violent death.

There was no escape.

Desmond had come to murder them, and they were quite at his mercy.

Willie uttered a cry of horror.

Desmond paused a moment, then took another step and seized Willie by the throat.

Willie sprang up and gave a loud shriek; the sound seemed almost to madden Durker to fury.

"Be quiet, you young whelp, or I'll throttle the pair of you!" hissed the ruffian, but Willie continued to shriek, and was now joined by Charlie.

Dropping the poker, Durker seized the younger child with his now disengaged hand.

He resolved not only to stifle their cries, but to strangle or suffocate them to death.

His iron grasp tightened on their throats; he thrust them back upon the bed.

Their breath was rapidly leaving them, their shrieks were dying away in choking gasps when suddenly a heavy blow descended upon the murderer's head, and relaxing his hold, he fell back with a groan—senseless.

In a few seconds consciousness returned to the two children, who felt themselves being gently lifted up in a pair of strong arms.

Over them bent a young man in the garb of a sailor.

"Thank Heaven, you're not quite dead!" he ejaculated; "I was just in time to tackle the scoundrel."

It was no time for explanation.

Their preserver's one object was to get them away as soon as possible from this abode of horror.

Durker lay unconscious in a corner, the blood flowing from a wound in his head, inflicted with the very weapon he had himself used.

The boys, assisted by their new friend, rapidly put on their clothes, and carrying Charlie, while leading Willie, the young sailor hastened down stairs.

He did not expect that he would be allowed to take away the children without opposition, but he was prepared to fight desperately in their defense.

His bodily strength and a formidable stick he carried of some foreign wood, as hard as iron, would stand him in good stead.

But as luck would have it, he effected the escape without opposition.

The landlord was attending to the few customers who still remained, who were making so much noise that the sailor, without being heard, passed by the room, and out through a side door.

It is true he was then only in a blind alley, and was soon in a bewildering labyrinth of squalid courts; but having at length reached a comparatively broad street, he felt safe.

Numerous desperate characters were about, but none ventured to attack or question him.

At last he met a policeman, to whom he told his adventure, and was recommended to take the children to the station.

So he and the orphans soon found themselves under that friendly shelter.

An official put several questions to them, and when the children told their names, the young sailor gave vent to an expression of amazement.

"Is it possible?" he cried. "Can it be the children of my Uncle Wilbert who have been treated in this cruel manner? How providential that I should be at hand to save you!"

"Who are you then?" asked Willie.

"I am your cousin, Harry Waife, who was thought to have gone down in the *Brian Boru*; but, by Heaven's help, I've been spared."

The rest of his story was soon told.

The ship had really gone down, though not quite "with all hands," as reported, and Harry, with four more, managed to keep afloat, and after being three days without food on a crazy raft, had been picked up by some Malays off Borneo, who were fishing in their canoes.

For weeks they lived among the savages, being kindly treated, and then set off into the interior, with the object of ultimately reaching the port of Sarawak.

Many were the adventures they met with; and long and toilsome was their expedition, but at length they arrived at Sarawak, whence they were enabled, after some delay, to sail for England.

They had landed the day before.

Harry, always reckless, had allowed himself to be in-

veigled from his companions, and brought to the low tavern in Anchor Alley, where a Spanish gambler succeeded in making him half drunk, and then fleecing him of all his money except a couple of five-pound notes he carried concealed in the lining of his hat.

He was sleeping off the effects of liquor and disappointment in the room below that of the orphans when Durker's murderous attempt was made, and the shrieks of the children brought the young man to the rescue.

We need not say how delighted were they to find a kind relative, returned, as it were, from the grave to befriend them.

Early the next morning, Harry Waife, accompanied by two policemen, set out for Anchor Alley, and at last succeeded in finding the place they sought.

The absence of the children had only just been discovered, and Durker, who was still too much suffering from his injuries to escape, and was being tended by his friends, was taken into custody.

Believing himself near death, he confessed his crime, and told all he knew concerning his employer.

In the afternoon the children, having been proceeded with suitable attire, set out with their cousin for Ferndale.

Mr. Garth Willison was that afternoon entertaining his friends.

They were rapidly assembling in considerable numbers for a grand dinner-party to be given in the evening.

He had of late, by lavish hospitality, succeeded in becoming very popular in the neighborhood of Ferndale, so much so that a deputation of the townsmen were now waiting upon him, requesting him to become a candidate for their borough at their next election.

It was his hour of triumph. Wealth and honor were his.

All obstacles to his success had been removed, and those whose opinion he most valued were there to behold him in all his glory.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising with dignity, "I have great pleasure in accepting the honor you are about to confer upon me; if I can thereby serve you I shall be only too happy, though I am aware the choice is due less to my merits than my position. A year ago I was poor and unknown, now fortune has smiled upon me, and my future task will be to prove I deserve it."

At this moment when the walls rang with cheers, he was suddenly seen to turn pale, his eyes opened wide in amazement and horror, and were fixed upon several persons now entering the room.

These were Harry Waife, leading the two children, accompanied by an inspector of police and a constable.

"Garth Willison," said the inspector, stepping up to the guilty man, "I arrest you on a charge of attempted murder!"

The culprit fell back on his chair senseless.

* * * * *

Instead of entering parliament, Garth Willison became a prisoner at Portland, and Durker shared his punishment.

But by good conduct, Garth managed to get off with little more than half of the ten years specified in his sentence.

He went to America, and has not since been heard of.

The two orphans find they could not have a kinder guardian than the now reformed scapegrace, Harry Waife.

THE GIPSY'S REVENGE;

OR,

THE PROPHECY OF BEECHMOOR.

CHAPTER I.

VENGEANCE.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

A true, vigorous, old-fashioned Christmas the rich said, when the holly glittered in the bright red light of log or coal fires.

Snow lay over the land.

The very wind seemed frozen like the lakes, it was so still.

But what was snow and frost to my Lord of Beechmoor?

Sir Everard March, after a wild youth, had inherited his dead father's estate, married and settled down.

For over a year he had been abroad, but had returned with his young wife and infant heir to hold high revel on Christmas Eve at the manor.

The season seemed being merrily kept everywhere, with one exception—in a gipsy tent pitched in a small dell within a mile of the manor.

About the fire of sticks, over which hung a kettle, sat three people.

Two women and a youth.

One of the former was young, and possessed the splendid features of the pure gipsy race.

The boy was her counterpart, with black hair and dark, flashing eyes.

The third was an old woman, whose features might once have been as the girl's, but which now were dried, wrinkled and haggard to almost hideousness.

Her claw-like hands were clasped around her knees, and her glittering eyes were fixed on the fire.

The girl's lips were compressed, the boy's handsome brows knit.

A gloom was over the three.

Abruptly the hag spoke:

"There's fine doings up at the manor to-night. My lady sits in state," she said, with a bitter sneer, "with lacqueys cringing to her call, while you, Hilda, sit in the winter snow. You, whose place the fair-faced my lady usurps."

"Silence, mother!" exclaimed the girl, almost fiercely. "Haven't I enough to bear with my own thoughts? Would you madden me?"

"Madden?" repeated the hag; "our race never maddens. It keeps sane for revenge. Tell me, Hilda, is your love for this Sir Everard dead? This man who gathered the sweetness of the pretty wayside flower, to fling it afterwards away? This man whose new born son is to take the place of your child and lord it over us?"

The beady eyes of the hag showed that she was conscious of lashing the handsome girl to fury.

"Love him?" cried the daughter, throwing up her beautiful arms; "yes, as the storm the ships it would wreck; as the starved eagle the prey it gets in its grasp. I curse him—curse him!"

Her voice had risen almost to a scream.

The boy, looking up, broke in:

"Peace, Hilda. Peace, mother. Is it the custom of our race to show our hate in words? Is it Hilda alone that has suffered? Where's Raphael, shot down by his pampered keepers because he took a hare that ran across his feet. Shot down, captured, and now works with a prison gang; he whose love was the free air, whose foot outrivaled the deer in fleetness."

"Our race—our race!" cried the hag, abruptly rising to her full height; "there is one thing the Romany never forgives—shame to its daughters! What has this Sir Everard done? Made us outcasts from our tribe until the stain is washed out. Yes—yes, he shot my boy—my Raphael! Ha-ha! and do you think old Rachel will sit calmly in the glen and take no vengeance? You her children? Shame—shame on your degenerate spirits!"

Her shrill, aged voice rang through the place, but Reuben did not bid her cease.

Both eagerly, with almost deference, watched, listened, and drew nearer.

"You'll be avenged?" murmured the son.

"Ay! Why did we tramp through the frost and snow to this place, but for it? Did you think it was to do honor to my lord, on his return with his fair-faced wife and the heir of which he was so proud? No!—but for vengeance—vengeance! In the dearest, proudest spot of his heart I'll strike him—strike him as he struck me!"

"How—how?" ejaculated the girl, eagerly grasping the hag's skirts.

"How? Listen, and you shall hear," and sinking back into her former position, grasping a hand of each, and turning her wrinkled face from one to the other, the hag rapidly whispered her plan.

As she did so, the dark eyes of the trio glowed in concert.

"And you have arranged this?" asked the girl.

"Everything is prepared," whispered the hag. "Reuben, have you the courage?"

The gipsy only laughed with scorn, saying, simply, for answer:

"When is it to be?"

The hag, arising, looked from the tent at the sky.

"Now," she replied.

"I am ready," was Reuben's response.

"Good!"

Motioning Hilda, the hag went with her to another part of the tent.

On coming back the girl's olive cheek was pale, her hands clenched.

Old Rachel, who had donned her cloak, beckoned to her son, and the two passed from the tent into the snow.

The girl, turning to the fire, sat down, flung her dark hair over her face like a veil, and swayed her body and moaned.

Meanwhile the dark forms of Reuben and the hag, one so lithe and graceful, the other decrepit, hurried under the trees to Beechwood Manor.

Entering the grounds by a gap in the fence, they cau-

tiously approached to within fifty yards, when they halted under a group of beeches.

The house was before them, lights in every window.

Past the lower ones shadows flitted, as in the dance, while music reached them through the still air.

"How gay they are—how gay!" chuckled the hag; "ha-ha! Reuben, look yonder; that is the window, in the angle. Forget it not."

"Trust me—and the woman?"

"Promised to meet me here at this hour. I told her her star, would be in conjunction with that of him, the gamekeeper she loves; ha-ha! and any question she asked at that time I could answer truly. Away, she is here."

As she spoke a cloaked female form was perceived coming swiftly from the house toward them.

In a second the young gipsy had dropped on hands and knees, and glided off like a snake among the bushes.

Hardly had he gone, than a pretty serving-maid tripped up to the hag and threw back her hood.

"How glad I am you are here," she gasped; "pray make haste; there's the silver, now tell me what the stars say, for the little master is alone, and I'm frightened, though he sleeps."

"There's no fear, pretty one, if he sleeps; I warrant all are too busy to miss you."

"That's true. But if my lady found I was not there, she'd never forgive me. So be quick."

The hag took the girl's hand and so held her that her back was toward the manor.

"These fingers were never formed for menial work," she muttered. "Slender as a lady's own."

Then, with subtle skill, the crone poured into the foolish servant's ear so flattering a tale of love, that the girl, entranced, forgot all else.

But the glittering eyes of the hag were, from under her hood, directed to the house.

A few minutes, and she perceived a dark form, slim and lithe, rapidly ascending the ivy, like a creeping shadow.

Soon the window she had specified opened, and, like a snake, the figure glided in and vanished.

In her excitement, the hag had paused.

The girl grew impatient.

"Is that all? I must, indeed, go."

"All? It's not half, my dear! What should you care about my lady's anger? You, who shall be her equal! See—see, here is a present in this line—diamonds!"

And the hag's story went on, as her fierce eyes watched. The figure had reappeared now.

Had glided down the ivy and vanished.

A space, and through the keen air came the peculiar hoot of an owl.

A fiendish smile passed over the hag's lips.

Yet she held the girl under her spell.

Held her until she saw the light in the window turn red, flicker and flash, and then whirl forth in smoke.

Watched her speed back, and afterwards made her way quickly under the trees, chuckling forth her triumph.

"A glorious Christmas for you, Sir Everard. It's a brave Christmas fire, but it will fail to warm your heart. To-night, though you know it not, Hilda has been avenged!"

What was that?

A cry!

A shout of many voices!

The fire had been discovered!

Eager hands were seeking to subdue it.

"Too late—too late!" cried the hag, as the flames leaped through the nursery window. "Too late!"

"Yes, too late!" repeated Reuben, appearing suddenly at her side. "The cradle and what it holds must already be ashes. Come—come!"

Bright had that Christmas eve dawned to Sir Everard March, and how bitter was the setting.

The alarm of fire being given, in terror the baronet, his frantic wife and frightened guests had rushed to the spot.

Out from the pretty nursery came towards them a dense volume of lurid smoke.

Through it Sir Everard had dashed, bringing back, with scorched hands and face, the small bed and coverlet of his pride, his infant boy, his heir.

But the infant form was charred, blackened, dead.

Now hours had passed, and the guests had sought their rooms to take flight in the morning from the house of sorrow.

The distracted Lady March was in the doctor's hands, and Sir Everard sat alone in the library, his head bent forward in his hands.

Did he in his misery recall the beautiful girl, the gipsy whose heart he had won, to cast it from him?

If so, it might have been a continuation of his thoughts when raising his head, he beheld peering in upon him the wrinkled countenance of old Rachel.

Pushing open the glass doors, the hag strode in, and standing there, exclaimed with triumph in her eyes:

"So, Sir Everard, the curse has fallen. The curse I uttered, and at which you jeered. Ha-ha! do you recollect the gipsy Hilda? I cursed—I cursed! and the curse has come! Listen to the legend of Beechmoor!"

Waving her gaunt arms, she repeated:

"A Christmas Eve shall rise and set,
A mother's cheek with tears be wet;
An heir is born, an heir is gone,
And Beechmoor's lord is left alone."

"Villanous hag!" cried Sir Everard, leaping to his feet and rushing forward.

But with a wild, exulting laugh old Rachel dashed through the window and was gone.

When morning dawned and search was made for the gipsies, it was found that they had struck their tents and disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST LOVE.

It was the bright, the joyous spring time, and a young boy, perched in the branches of an oak, stretching over the surface of a trout stream, that flashed, foamed, and danced its way over brown rock, was enjoying the new birth of the year with the luxurious abandon of the nomad race, for his dark complexion, bronzed by sun and weather betokened him of it.

His figure was slim and graceful, his features proud and handsome, while notwithstanding his attire consisted but of a pair of ragged trousers and an equally ragged woollen shirt, his appearance was wondrously picturesque as he swung over the stream.

Suddenly through the still air arose a shrill scream of terror, followed by the sharp bark of a dog.

Raising himself quickly, the boy looked in the direction.

Twenty yards lower down the stream was a lovely little girl standing on a piece of rock in the center of the water.

She had evidently been crossing the huge stepping stones to the opposite side, when a rough, snarling cur had leaped out, barring her advance.

Alarmed, her golden hair streaming on the wind, the child stood poised on the slippery rock, unable to turn, terrified to advance.

The boy at once saw her danger.

His white teeth set, his dark eyes glowed as he sprang from the bough.

But his aid so far came too late.

The dog had jumped on to a nearer stone, the child had turned to fly, her foot had slipped on the slimy moss, and with a scream she had fallen into the rushing stream.

Like a flash of light the gipsy boy darted to the spot.

A well-directed stone sent the cur off howling, then the lad had flung himself into the water after the child.

Fortunately the broken rocks were many, and seizing the girl's dress, her rescuer managed, after much difficulty, to get her back to the stepping-stones.

"Don't cry, miss, don't be frightened," he said, encouragingly, "it's all right, only your pretty dress is spoiled."

"Oh," sobbed the child, "I don't mind my dress, I've got plenty; but I thought I was going to be drowned, and so I should have been but for you."

"Well, perhaps, but you're not, you see, are you? Take my hand and get to the bank; don't fear, I've given that cur one for himself he doesn't like."

"What a brave boy you are," remarked the child, admiringly.

The gipsy laughed and his cheek flushed, as, holding the small white hand of his companion he supported her over the stones to the bank.

"By Jove! it's a picture. If I could but keep those two there for a space as models, I couldn't have a better subject. Master Raphael, you act the gallant knight as if you were born to the profession. What a pretty romance might grow from this!"

The speaker was a man of about five-and-thirty; his dress was rough but serviceable; he wore a slouched hat, a long beard, and carried an artist's knapsack.

From a distance he had watched the scene with interest. Meanwhile, the gipsy was doing his best to squeeze the wet from the girl's clothes.

"Oh, dear," she sobbed, "what will mademoiselle say?"

"Who is mademoiselle?"

"My governess."

"Well," replied the boy, "she ought to be glad you are saved."

"She will say I ought not to have been there, but my uncle and aunt will be glad; they will give you anything you like."

"I don't want anything for saving you," answered the gipsy, lifting his dark eyes as he knelt before the child, to her face; "how beautiful you are. I'd sooner that you gave me a kiss than all the gold that is."

Laughing, the child put out her pink lips and kissed his sunburnt forehead.

"There," she said, "but you must come and let Uncle Sir Everard thank you, too."

"Sir Everard," exclaimed the boy, rising quickly to his feet, his color fled, his brows knit; "do you mean Sir Everard March?"

"Yes; do you know uncle?"

"No," and the next words came through his clenched teeth; "nor don't want to, I hate him."

But Lucy Beresford had not heard the speech, for suddenly there had loomed before her the angry visage of the French governess.

"Mademoiselle," she shrieked, "what is this? Look at your dress! what has this dirty little ragamuffin done to you?"

"He isn't a dirty little ragamuffin, mademoiselle," cried the child, with spirit, as she took the gipsy's hand; "he has saved my life; I should have been drowned but for him; he is coming to the manor, and Uncle Everard will thank him."

The governess hearing what had occurred, grew alarmed for herself.

Her charge must have dry clothes.

Miss Lucy was the pet of her childless uncle and aunt; if anything happened to her, mademoiselle would suffer.

Taking Lucy's hand she bade her run to the house.

But freeing herself, the child sped back to the gipsy.

"Good-by," she said; "I shall always, always love you."

Raphael, for so the artist had called him, watched her disappear among the trees, then lightly bounding across the stepping-stones, climbed up the opposite bank, when there came sneaking toward him the cur.

Stooping, he caressed the animal.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," he said; "I never dreamed she was of that hateful race. Grandam Rachel will say I ought to have let her drown, but I couldn't have done that."

"But you should, outcast of your tribe, you should," cried the eldritch voice of the hag close by his ear.

The boy sprang up, and for a second recoiled before the crone's wrath.

In another he stood firm.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Why, boy? because she is one of the race that spurned and crushed yours. Where is your Uncle Raphael, and who sent him a prisoner over the seas? Yet you plucked this girl from death."

"I did not know, grandam, who she was, though if I had——"

"Well?" shrieked the hag.

"I couldn't have let her drown. She has not harmed me. She is too beautiful."

Old Rachel raised her stick as if in her rage she would have struck the brave speaker to the earth.

Suddenly her expression changed to a malignant, evil smile.

Laying her claw-like hand on his arm, she said:

"I see—I see, you love her, Raphael. You, the gipsy brat, she the fine lady! You love her! Ho! this is fine—Your cheek turns red. Ah, and why shouldn't you marry her? This girl is the apple of Sir Everard's eye. Why shouldn't she be yours when you are a man? Ha—ha! was she kind to you? She kissed you, I saw it!"

"She says she shall always love me," said the boy, determinedly.

"Ha-ha-ha!" screamed the hag. "Raphael, grow—grow; she shall be yours! My revenge is not dead yet!"

And at the top of her cracked voice she uttered some rhymes.

"What's that you say, grandam?" asked the lad.

"Nothing—nothing but a prophecy. Come, child, come. You shall see this pretty lady often. Old Rachel will manage it. Leave it all to her."

So saying, her hand yet on his shoulder, chuckling to herself, she hurried him back to the encampment.

Not two hours later, a handsome carriage stopped at the entrance of the dell where the gipsy tents were pitched, and two ladies alighting, advanced toward the nomads.

"Hilda!" ejaculated the old crone, "it's my Lady March!"

"I know it," replied the daughter, her teeth on her lip until the blood started.

"What comes she here for? Why comes she here?"

"To reward Raphael. Peace!" and proud, beautiful, defiant, she drew herself erect.

The hag deemed it best, however, not to know the visitors, and hobbling forward, said, in a professional whine:

"Want your fortune told, pretty lady? A happy past, a happy future. A handsome husband. A proud wife and mother."

A spasm passed over Lady March's face.

"You are wrong, dame, in your fortune," she remarked, sadly. "No. My visit is in reference to this brave boy," indicating Raphael. "We owe him a great service, and would make him a return."

"How noble and kind the great folks are," mumbled the hag, with covert derision.

"Stay, mother," said Hilda, stepping haughtily forward. "If you are aunt to the girl Raphael rescued, you are Lady March?"

"I am Lady March, and grateful to this boy; Sir Everard and I would make his future our care. We will take

him, if you will let us, to the manor, and there rear and educate him."

"We let?" broke in the gipsy. "Let Raphael answer for himself. Speak!"

The boy raised his dark eyes steadily, as he replied:

"Sooner than accept favors from Sir Everard March, I would jump from the highest hill into the river to-day. I would not have helped him. I would have let him drown. I hate him, and would laugh did I see him dead!"

Old Rachel burst forth into a triumphant chuckle.

"Woman!" exclaimed Lady March, surprised, indignant, "what does this mean?"

"Ask Sir Everard," answered Hilda, bending slightly forward, her black eyes fixing my lady's. "Tell him that you have made your proposal to Hilda the gipsy, the sister of Raphael, the man his gamekeepers shot. Now go. This is a poor home, but it is our own, and we desire no intruders."

"Yes—yes, our own!" shrieked old Rachel, as Lady March and her companion hurried back to the carriage; "and we have an heir to succeed to it. Tell Sir Everard that. Tell him there are more verses than one in the Beechmoor prophesy!"

"A Christmas eve shall rise and set,
A mother's cheek with tears be wet;
An heir is born, an heir is gone,
And Beechmoor's lord is left alone."

"Bid him remember old Rachel's curse!"

"There, now. What a cursing old dame you are."

The speaker was the artist.

Coming on the spot, he had caught the beldam's withered arm, and pulled it down.

"What's the matter?"

"That I expect we must strike our tents to-morrow," retorted the hag. "We have received notice to quit from Sir Everard."

"What! for Raphael saving the child's life? Impossible!"

"Sir," put in Hilda, proudly, "a whim made you wish to join our wandering life. We granted you hospitality. Do not abuse it by seeking to make our secrets yours."

"I stand corrected," bowed the artist. "I meant not to offend. I thank you for your hospitality, and would make some amends—not money, that you have refused. Give me Raphael for a companion."

"You would educate him," remarked Hilda.

"You would make a gentleman of him!" hissed the hag.

"I would make an artist of him, and I hope the terms are synonymous."

"Never!" ejaculated Hilda.

"But it shall be," put in old Rachel, quickly; "educate him, make a gentleman of him. The painted canary gets into the golden cage when the sparrow's rejected."

"Until the painted canary is discovered. Well," to Raphael, "what say you, lad?"

"I would like to go with you," was the slow answer.

"Why, you were delighted at the idea yesterday."

"Ha—ha; is he the first," laughed the crone, "that a pretty face made hesitate? There, come with me, lad, and old Rachel shall tell your fortune."

She led him away, and for some while they were in deep converse.

When she brought him back his cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkling.

"I will go with you, sir, gladly," he said.

"Mother," whispered Hilda, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Ask not yet, but be satisfied that the gipsy's vengeance is not yet satisfied, though it shall be; Raphael loves Sir Everard's niece, and Sir Everard's niece shall love him."

"Would you have them wed?"

"That would be a sweet revenge if a better did not offer," replied the crone; "no—no; no wedding. Girl, do

you not recollect the Beechmoor prophecy? Halter nor convict clog is not for yonder boy. Wait—wait. Ah, so will I work that Sir Everard's heartstrings shall snap with misery, for my curse is upon him."

That night in a small glade where a fire had been lighted and sticks laid curiously on the ground, the boy was made in the presence of Hilda and old Rachel to take a fearful oath to be true to his race, never to keep his whereabouts a secret from them, and while he lived never to forgive his mother's wrongdoer and his uncle's persecutor.

The next morning at break of day he quitted the camp with the artist.

As he went, old Rachel, extending her arms like an ancient prophetess, murmured some words after him.

Were they for good or evil?

The next chapter will show.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROPHECY.

YEARS have passed.

Again the festive season is approaching, and the clear north winds that prevail make men predict a "rare fine Christmas."

Once more there is to be high revel at Beechmoor, for Christmas Eve is to see the betrothal of the lovely Lucy Bereford, to her cousin, Stanley March.

The young man loves, but the girl will give a cold hand and a colder heart; nevertheless, Sir Everard, her guardian, in this will have his way, more especially as his nephew is his heir, and more especially yet as there have been hints dropped into his ear that the girl's gratitude to the preserver of her life has turned to love.

She wed one of a gipsy race! she wed a son of the gipsy Hilda!

He would have seen her dead first.

The hour was eight, a cold, clear winter's moon shone through the bare tree branches on the flashing stream, as a young man paced backward and forward in the trees' shadow.

Handsome, well and firmly built, few eyes save one bright pair, would have recognized in him the gipsy Raphael.

The owner of that pair of eyes was even then swiftly approaching.

Raising his head he saw her.

He sprang forward.

They were locked in each other's arms.

"Lucy, my life, my darling," he cried.

"Dear Raphael," she murmured; "oh, but I fear should my absence be discovered."

"Fear nothing, sweetest, for naught there is to dread; should any approach is not old Rachel on the watch to warn us? Truly she has been a faithful friend to us, Lucy. What should I have done, how lived, had she not brought me news of you?"

"And me news of you," smiled the girl, placing her little hand fondly on his arm; "she has indeed been an untiring messenger. Even from my childhood she has, despite danger to herself, found means to whisper in my ear of your brave fight with the world; how day and night you were striving after success, for my sake, and how one day the world would speak of you, Raphael, as a great painter."

"Yes," he responded, bitterly, "but by birth a gipsy, an outcast, Lucy."

"He who makes a name is greater than he who is born to one," she responded; "Stanley will be Sir Stanley one day, but will the world talk of him?"

Raphael took the girl to his heart and kissed her fondly.

"What will the world's praise be in comparison to one sweet word of thine, dear love?" he murmured; "when

once I call you wife, the fame that is promised I will win. Lucy, tell me, do you hesitate to take the step to come with me?"

"I tremble—my heart sinks with fear," she answered; "but I do not hesitate. Could I hope to win my uncle not to urge my union with Stanley I would wait, but I cannot. So, Raphael, I will go with you—only—oh, only if I am detected."

"There is no fear of that. Old Rachel promises to manage it all. When the guests are assembled on Christmas Eve, you will slip away, love. Rachel will lead you to where I wait, and before an hour, we'll be beyond pursuit. Hark! someone comes. It is she."

Into the twilight of the trees hobbled the hag Rachel.

"Away, girl—away!" she exclaimed, in a whisper. "Someone comes down the river path—away. Nay, no more kissing; time enough for that on Christmas Eve. Ha-ha! Christmas Eve. Away, girl!" she added, bringing down her crutch-stick angrily; "would you spoil all?"

And grasping Lucy's arm, she hastened her steps.

But already too much time had been wasted.

The comer was close on their track.

He surely would overtake them.

So thought Raphael, and with yet deeper consternation, recognized the comer as Stanley March.

In a second his plan was formed.

The path was narrow.

Stooping his head as though in thought, he strode forward rapidly, and purposely came in such violent contact with the other, as to fling him against the hedge that bounded the steep high path on one side.

Uttering an oath, Stanley March regained his feet and turned.

In the moonlight they stood face to face, and Raphael was recognized.

"Is it you, you gipsy dog?" he cried, in fury. "Look next time where you are coming to; and stand out of a gentleman's path."

"The 'gipsy dog' having been endowed by nature with thews and sinews," laughed Raphael, derisively, as with folded arms he stood in the very center of the way, "the 'gentleman' will have to use his before he removes me, if he do not apologize."

"Apologize to you—you——" and he uttered a word as he struck at the gipsy with his whip, that made the blood leap to Raphael's brain.

In a second he was at the speaker's throat.

In another the two were struggling with the fury of madmen on the dangerously narrow path.

Backwards and forwards, now down, now up, not a moment's release—a blow, a stagger on the false edge, a wild clutch at a stunted tree, and Raphael stood alone on the moonlit path.

Stanley March, with a fearful cry, had fallen over the rough, rugged side, into the river flowing some twenty feet beneath.

A moment the gipsy stood stunned, then, with the ease of a mountaineer, lowered himself to the narrow river path beneath.

There, in the clear water that flowed over him, was his rival motionless, his pale face upward.

Quickly Raphael drew him on to the bank and felt his pulse.

It beat.

What was he to do? He must have help.

He, the gipsy, dared not seek it.

Ah, there were voices coming along the path—the river keepers.

He shouted.

The shout was answered—nearer, nearer.

They would find and help Stanley March.

Assured of this, almost as nimbly as when the nomad boy, Raphael crossed the stream, bounding from rock to

rock, and disappeared among the bushes on the other side.

The next day the hue and cry were after Raphael.

Rumor stated that Stanley March had been cruelly set upon and would have been murdered, but for the fortunate arrival of the keepers, while it was affirmed that the would have been murderer was the gipsy.

His victim had denounced him. Yes, it was true, but he basely concealed how the quarrel had arisen.

Lucy Beresford knew, for she had heard from old Rachel, and her pure heart the more deeply despised her cousin.

The pursuit was sharp. Old Rachel was thoughtful.

What should she do?

Finally she decided.

A badly-written paper was secretly put in Sir Everard's hand. It said:

"Do you want your past made public? Put the gipsy Raphael in the dock, and it shall be!"

Sir Everard's face darkened like thunder, but he stopped the pursuit.

Yet what was Raphael to him? Nothing.

But what might not this hag relate in her revenge?

And thus came Christmas Eve. Lights, guests, merriment at the manor.

Silence in the gipsy tent pitched in the dell.

Crouched over the fire, old Rachel was scrawling with the stump of a pencil some words on a paper laid a-top of a box.

Every now and then she left off to chuckle and rub her skinny hands.

"One prophecy has been fulfilled," she mumbled. "Now for the last. Let this succeed, and my revenge is satisfied. Oh, how easy can prophecies come true when you try to make them."

Returning to the paper, she continued writing, to her a matter of considerable difficulty.

When it was finished she arose, put on her cloak, left the tent, and proceeded towards the manor.

How very like that other Christmas Eve, only Renben was not there.

The revels were progressing merrily at the manor, the clock had chimed half-past seven.

At nine Lucy Beresford and Stanley March were to be formerly betrothed, the contract signed.

When, as Sir Everard passed a window, it was swiftly opened, and a stone dropped at his feet.

Around it was a paper.

Removing it, he read with amaze:

"At eight to-night the dove, to escape the golden fetter you have prepared for her, will fly with the hawk. Be cautious, as is the hawk, or you'll scare both. He will wait at the east gate. If you have courage come alone. At any rate come armed; you know he hates you, and he can be desperate."

Crushing the letter in his palm, he hastened to the library.

Should he send to Lucy's room?

That would lose time if she had already started.

Was the warning true?

He was sure of it, though he never guessed the sender.

No, he would start at once for the east gate, but not alone. Stanley should go with him.

Summoning his nephew—arming themselves, they set forth.

They uttered not a word.

Ah! What was that flitting through the trees?

Two female forms.

Quick—quick!

Yes, there was the east gate. There was Lucy in her lover's arms.

With a shout, Sir Everard and Stanley ran forward.

Lucy, uttering a scream, dropped insensible on the snow.

"Fire—fire!" hissed the hag behind Raphael; "fire over

their heads, they are but game-keepers. It will scare them, and give you time for flight. Think of the girl; her fate if caught."

So urged, the gipsy fired.

The shot was instantly returned by Sir Everard.

It came whistling through the trees with deadly aim.

Raphael, without so much as a sigh, gave one bound in the air, staggered, and fell, face upwards, on the ground.

A wild, unearthly yell burst from old Rachel. A yell of triumph.

Drawing her thin, tall form erect, raising her arms, she cried:

"Revenged—revenged! dead. The prophecy is fulfilled—fulfilled!" and she chanted:

A Christmas Eve shall rise and set,
A mother's cheek with tears be wet;
An heir is born, an heir is gone,
And Beechmoor's lord is left alone.

A Christmas Eve shall rise and set,
The grass of Beechmoor shall be wet,
Red be the dales, and red the plain,
With blood of son—by father slain.

"Your son, Sir Everard! Ha-ha, your own son!" she shrieked.

"Hag, what mean you?" ejaculated the baronet; "I have no son."

"You had a son—you had a daughter. The daughter died in the gipsy's tent, and the son was clothed in

fine linen and purple. Ha-ha, but the gipsy swore revenge. Do you hear me, Sir Everard, it was I who set fire to your darling's costly home. But the child the flames consumed was already dead. The live one was in my arms. Yes, stare, look black, the past is past undoing. I stole your boy—I reared him as gipsies are reared. I fostered his love for this girl—it was my hand that brought you here, that your hand should slay him—that the prophecy should be fulfilled, and I revenged—revenged!"

"Is is false," cried Sir Everard, aghast.

"It is true. Dead—he is dead. Hilda is avenged."

"Seize her!" cried Stanley March, but with eldritch laughter old Rachel had fled through the trees.

His son—his heir, then, had not perished in that fire, but survived to fall by a father's hand!

Maddened with agony Sir Everard flung himself by the side of the supposed gipsy.

Then a scream of joy as loud as old Rachel's own burst from him, for Raphael's eyes had opened, meeting his.

"He is not dead," he cried; "he lives—he lives, my son!"

It was so.

The ball had pierced the shoulder, missing the heart by an inch.

When another Christmas came it witnessed the union of Hubert March—once Raphael the gipsy, and Lucy Beresford.

The Beechmoor prophecy has not yet been fulfilled.

May it be baffled, as was the GIPSY'S VENGEANCE.

[THE END.]

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